

*A Tale, Told By an Idiot*

*Craig A. Eddy*



*Book I of  
Lords of Terror and Abuse*



# **A Tale, Told by an Idiot**

by  
Craig A. Eddy

Book I of The Lords of Terror and Abuse

Copyright: © 2013 by Craig A. Eddy

# A Tale, Told by an Idiot

is

Copyright: © 2013 by Craig A. Eddy  
All Rights Reserved

For licensing options or permissions to use parts or all of this work, please contact the author directly.

This is a work of fiction. No persons used as characters in the book actually exist and any resemblance to persons, living or dead, is purely coincidental. Persons, organizations, companies or products listed in the book are for the purpose of story development only and no actual attitude toward or connection with such is to be inferred.

# Chapter 1

## Culture Clash

### (Monday morning)

“Good morning, gentlemen. Don't get up. Sorry to keep you waiting.” The sixteen year old girl strode confidently the length of the room to her place at the head of the table. “I understand that you wanted to see me.”

“What is this?” one of the four men said. “We did not come to talk to women or children. We came to make serious talk with the head of the nation called Home.”

“No, gentlemen, you came to try to pull your cultural bullying on the Leader of Home. I believe you've been seriously misinformed about a number of things,” she said. “So, let's start from the top, shall we?” she said, sweetly. “First, if you want to speak to the Leader of Home, then you WILL speak with me. I AM the Leader of Home. Second, you have come to try to get trade agreements with Home – agreements that would be seriously one sided in your favor based on your cultural bullying and threats. Won't work, gentlemen. I don't bully worth a damn, and there really isn't anything that you have that we want, and nothing we have that we are so desperate to sell that we feel we have to sell to you.”

“We do not deal with women and children!” another of the men shouted.

“My! How vehement. How uncivilized. Do you really think to impress me with such an attitude? You bring shame on yourselves and disgrace your nation. Now, you have exactly thirty seconds to begin behaving like a civilized people or you will be returned to your masters in that disgrace,” she said, quietly, pulling a small clock out of a 'no pocket' and setting it on the table.

“You do not speak to us this way! You are nothing but an unlettered cow. Go get your master! We demand it!”

“And now,” she said, “you attempt to insult and intimidate the very person you came to see. Well, it's only to be expected of persons of no worth. Gentlemen, you have failed in your mission,” she added. “My name is Muriel, and I am the Leader of Home, no matter what you think. And I know how desperate you are to come to some sort of agreement with Home. The last four years haven't been kind to your nation, what with losing business from this country's manufacturers and all. And, now I expect that you will try threats. They won't work, gentlemen. They won't work because I, an unarmed person, am more of a threat to you and to your country than all your military might and nuclear bombs are to us.”

“Your time is up, gentlemen. Now, you will be returned to your country, and your shame will be known to your masters and all your people,” Muriel said, quietly. Six envoys suddenly appeared in the room. “You will be returned as common criminals.”



"You have no right!" the loud mouthed one screamed. "You are nothing!"

"Mata, would you be so kind as to make sure their possessions are collected? I think we'll just dump these . . . gentlemen . . . back in their country in some spectacular manner," she said, and began to glow. "You disgust me, gentlemen. You have no respect. You have no civilized behavior. You are not diplomats. You are merely bullies in suits. And that is something we can correct, now. Squad, strip them to their underclothes and pack their clothes up. We're taking a trip. These scum are going home."

Minutes later, four nearly naked men were deposited in front of the national council, their belongings piled beside them. Their hands were crudely tied behind their backs, and nooses were their necktie. There was a crack like thunder at very close range, and six figures appeared in the air above the heads of the council.

**BEHOLD THE SCUM**, Muriel sent in a way that they'd be able to understand. **BEHOLD THE INSULT YOU WOULD TRY TO INFLICT ON THE LEADER OF HOME. I DO NOT ACCEPT YOUR INSULT. I DO NOT ACCEPT THEIR MISSION OR THEIR ATTITUDE. YOU HAVE DISPLAYED YOUR LACK OF CIVILIZATION BY SENDING THEM TO ME. YOU HAVE DISPLAYED YOUR LACK OF RESPECT FOR OTHER PEOPLES AND OTHER WAYS. YOUR BULLYING TACTICS DO NOW WORK ON ME.** As she spoke, she grew in size, and glowed. Her eyes, glowing black, bored into the leaders of the council. **NOW YOU ARE PUT ON NOTICE. YOU WILL CHANGE. YOU WILL BECOME CIVILIZED, OR YOUR CRIMINAL WAYS WILL BE FORCIBLY STOPPED BY ME. BE AFRAID, PEOPLE. I WILL NOT TOLERATE YOUR CURRENT BEHAVIOR ANY LONGER.** And she and Mata and her squad translated out.

"Well," Mata said, grinning, as they returned to Muriel's office. "That certainly should have corrected any constipation that they had. Trying to start a war?"

"Mata, they went to seven Enclaves and tried to intimidate the Ambassadors before they came here. They got the same answer each time, that they'd have to come talk to me. Well, they came, and the first thing out of their mouth was that they wouldn't treat with women and children, and demanded that I send in my master. Now, I could have had Ted go in and talk to them, but they'd simply have tried the same bullying tactics on him. In which case, we'd have been transporting bodies back to China instead of live, disgraced people," Muriel said.

"True. Ted wouldn't have put up with it, either. But do you really think that you can make a whole country change its behavior?" Mata asked.

"Nope. But THEY can. We can help them. They've lost significant amounts of their balance of trade with western countries this last year, and they're hurting. They're going to hurt more if I put a shield around their country so nothing goes in or out," Muriel said. "And that kind of hurt can result in an uprising of the people."

"You'll have to take out their military, too, you know. Leave it in place and they'll just have another dictatorship."

"True. Have we got the location of all their arms, yet?" Muriel asked.

"Working on it. I think we have most of them."

"Good. That'll be my next move. Missiles first, then planes, then heavy arms and stockpiles. And cut off their supply from other countries," Muriel said. "Literally pull their teeth. They've been using the nuclear threat for too long. So, what's next for today?"

"The Russian Minister of Commerce."

"Ah, yes. Well, at least he pretends to be civilized. In my casual area, I think. Coffee for me, and did we ever figure out how to make the Russian tea?"

"Oh, that. Really easy," Mata said. "But I think we should give him a choice."

"Oh, definitely," Muriel grinned. "And some entertainment. I'm SURE you made a record of the proceedings we just went through."

"I did. But why show them to him?" Mata asked.

"He's worried about his Eastern front. China's been making feints in that direction, again. He isn't really here for trade. He's here to see if we will help defend them against the 'yellow horde', as he likes to call them," Muriel replied.

"Wait a minute! THAT'S why you played the 'A' card today, isn't it. You want to push the Chinese government hard enough to react against YOU, so you'll have an excuse to remove their ability to attack anyone!" Mata said.

"Of course. I thought you realized that, Mata. But we can't align ourselves with any nationality, so we have to have them direct their attack at us. That way, we're simply defending ourselves," Muriel said.

"Well, he should be here any minute. I was really surprised that you'd stacked the two appointments so closely together," Mata said. "Now, I think I understand. You knew that the Chinese delegation would be a bust, didn't you?"

"Of course. It's their cultural belief that they're automatically better than anyone else simply because they're Chinese. I had no intention of treating with them, anyway. They have nothing we want, and we have nothing to sell to them. They simply provided me with the excuse," Muriel said.

"Well, I think your next victim is approaching," Mata said. "Try not to eat him alive."

Muriel giggled, a hold-over from her younger days. "Bring him on. I can lick anyone in the house," she said, then switched to her panther head and slowly licked her lips. Mata just laughed.

"You're bad, girl. Go sit down, and I'll bring him right in."

As Muriel sat down in her recliner, Chuck brought her a cup of coffee and whispered in her ear, "I really hope he chooses tea. I think we did an excellent job on the holder."

"I hope so, too. A little gift from us isn't going to hurt relations, and may soften the blow of our not defending Russia," Muriel said.

As Chuck left, Mata came in and said, "Muriel, the Minister is here."

"Ah! Good timing. Come, sit. We of course have coffee, sir. But, I think we can also provide tea for you, if you'd prefer. Oh, your way, of course," Muriel said, as Chuck returned with a silver tray with both tea and coffee, a Home logo mug for the coffee and an ornate silver holder surrounding two thirds of a glass for the tea.

The Minister picked up the glass and holder, and examined them. "Impressive," he said. "So delicate and intricate. Where did you manage to get this?"

"Oh, one of our people made it. I thought it might be nice to provide you with something out of your culture while you were here."

"It's beautiful. I've never seen anything like it," he said.

"It's yours," Muriel replied. "A little gift."

The minister took a couple of minutes preparing the tea from concentrate, hot water, and strawberry jam. "Superb!" he said. Then added, "You're not going to help us, are you?"

"So direct. Are you learning bad habits from us?" Muriel replied with a smile. "Still, as you know, we are unable to align ourselves with one particular nation. However, if it's any help, you need not fear your Eastern border. The Chinese have found a new target for their ire. I expect that they will be expressing that ire, shortly. Allow me to provide some entertainment. Mata? On the large screen, I think." The record started from where Muriel sailed into the conference room, and ended with them translating out of the national council chamber. The Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs was laughing from the time the Chinese delegation was stripped and tied.

"Muriel, are you acting out again?" asked a friendly voice.

"Taylor! When did you get back. Come in. Sit. Tell Chuck what you want to drink, that's non-alcoholic of course. Oh, and by the way, this is the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs."

"I know. We've met. He stopped by my place before he came over here. You don't mind me and some of my troops hanging out over here, do you?" asked Taylor.



“Not at all. How many are you up to, now?”

“Two thousand,” he said. “It took me a half an hour to give the last batch their stripes and passports. Which brings me to the reason that I came. Would it be permissible for me to have two or three more Ambassadors? This is starting to get hectic.”

“Well, I would think so, but why don’t we clear it with Ted, first,” Muriel said.

“Did I hear my name mentioned in artery? I know it couldn’t have been mentioned in vein,” Ted said, walking into the casual area. “Hey, Taylor. Behaving yourself?”

“Oh, heck no. That’s no fun.”

“Good man!” Ted said, grinning. “So, what’s the occasion?”

“I need some help handing out stripes and passports. The Queen, my grandmother, insists that we get up to full regimental size. Muriel suggested that we pass it by you.”

“I don’t see a real problem. Who?” asked Ted.

“My original three guards. Sid’s a light colonel, now, and the other two are majors. They’re good, solid men that won’t abuse the privilege.”

“Yep. I worked with them last year,” Ted said. “Very good men. Aside from the constant ‘siring’, they know their stuff, and don’t hesitate to make suggestions. Good ones, at that. Why, he came up with . . .”

**INCOMING! Mata sent. MISSILES INCOMING, TARGET AMBASSADORS OFFICES PLUS-MINUS THIRTY FEET. TIME TO NO-FLY ZONE FIVE MINUTES.**

“Troops,” Taylor said and sent on a wide band as he ran out the door, “saddle up. Home logos only. Hit them when any portion of them crosses the no-fly zone.” Taylor leaped into the air, legs spread, and was suddenly ‘mounted’ on a ghost horse, a lance at his right hand. Muriel didn’t even have time to act. And then, the most amazing sight she could have seen. From all over Enclave troops in two tone green, ‘mounted’ on horses of air and with couched short lances, more like staffs, formed up over the compound. And they were grinning.

The missiles never stood a chance. As they crossed into the no-fly zone they were destroyed from all sides. Taylor landed in front of Muriel’s office, and about a hundred of the troops followed him. The rest chose other points in Enclave.

Before anyone could say anything, Taylor shouted and sent, “Caps and feathers, people. We’ll show them what the little men can do.”

“Just how many did you bring over, Taylor?” asked Ted.

“Well, I left Sid and the two majors back at Enclave Extension to hold down the fort, so to speak.”

“Bad pun, Taylor. Are you telling me that you brought two thousand troops here?” asked Muriel.

“Hey, we can't let you have ALL the fun. Now, let me show you something,” he added, and handed her a CD. They went back in her office and played the record of the events, and Muriel saw why he wanted her to see it. Clearly marked on the side of the missiles was the flag and characters for China. And the tips of the missiles were red.

"OK," Ted said. "But what's with the caps and feathers?"

"Oh, it's from 'The Fairies' by William Allingham - 'Green jacket, red cap, And white owl's feather'. We'll teach them that they . . .  
 . . . daren't go a-hunting,  
 For fear of little men:"

"What's with you and poetry?" Muriel said.

“The benefits of a classical education, dontchaknow,” Taylor replied in a fake, upper class accent, and they laughed. “Seriously? I just happen to like some poetry. Also Shakespeare. But I won't tell you what I like in novels. You'd consider me warped.”

“Oh. THOSE kind of books,” Muriel said.

“Nope. Science Fantasy.”

“Yep. You’re warped. I can’t see why ANYONE would want to read that stuff,” Muriel said.

“Well, there was this one about a young girl that managed to get some astounding powers and . . . . Never mind,” Taylor said.

“And you believe that stuff?” Muriel asked.

“Oh, heck no. But it's fun to read,” he replied. “Now, if you'll excuse me, we've got some targets to slag. When we get done, there won't be more than a handful of guns in the entire country, and they'll be the highest form of armament that they'll have.”

“Why you? They were aimed at me!” Muriel said.

“Defense of Home and its properties. And we are the Regiment of Home. You're civilians, and it's our duty to protect you.” And, without giving her a chance to reply, he mounted up and called his troops and translated them out.

"Wow," Muriel said, quietly.

“Yep. He grew up. And grew into his command, nicely. 'Jolly Greens' – what a statement. Hold off sending that disk out to the media until he comes back. I'm hoping we can get a record of his retaliation, and pair the two,” Ted said. “That would make it plain to the world that attacking any property owned by Home will result in the removal of military capability of the country involved.”

Muriel turned to the shocked Russian, still seated in her casual area. “Minister, I don't think you have to worry about your Eastern border anymore.”

“But . . . you said that you wouldn't do anything for us!”

“We didn't. First, it's Taylor and his troops that are doing it. Second, you heard him, it's not for you. It's because they attacked property owned by Home,” Muriel said.



## Chapter 2

### Media Blitz

(Monday afternoon)

*"We interrupt this programming for a Special Announcement."*

*"Breaking News!" Breaking News graphic and music plays. "Missiles were sited entering American air space. The apparent target was the Envoy Enclave in the Western states. At ten oh two AM four missiles were picked up on radar entering American air space. We have footage of the destruction of the missiles as they crossed the no-fly zone surrounding the Envoy Enclave in the Southeast Valley of the Sun in Arizona"*

The record, from Taylor's point of view is played, showing his troops mounting up and riding to meet the missiles, then destroying them. *"The missiles were destroyed by the efforts of two thousand of the Regiment of Home, consisting of humans trained in Envoy techniques and given military training. A still picture from another point of view shows that the missiles were marked with the flag and characters of the People's Republic of China. This attempt to destroy the Envoy Enclave was apparently carried out in retaliation for Chinese diplomats that were returned to China in disgrace. These diplomats had apparently attempted to insult Muriel, the Leader of Home, at the beginning of trade negotiations, and their attempt to try to force her to submit to their form of formalities."*

Scene changes to a view of Muriel in Class 'A' uniform. *"The Chinese diplomats were belligerent and verbally abusive, screaming at me that they would not treat with a woman or child, and that we must observe their formalities. This is uncivilized behavior between peoples of different nations. When this was pointed out to them, they called me an 'unlettered cow' and ordered me to get my master. This is laughable since, as I am THE Leader of Home, I am my own master. But, as an attempt at insulting me, and as a display of their uncivilized behavior, I felt that it was enough to return them to their people and warn there national council that I would not deal with them at all until they changed their behavior."*

*"Ambassador Muriel, did you order any subsequent action?" the reporter asks.*

*"I didn't have to. Ambassador Taylor, the Colonel in Chief of the Regiment of Home took immediate action, assembling his troops and staging a raid on the Chinese mainland. The raid was successful. The People's Republic of China no longer has the arms or ammunition to engage in any sort of warfare. I doubt if there are more than a handful of guns anywhere in their country. It is regretful that the raid resulted in the loss of several hundred lives, but as these were all military personnel of a country that had just attacked us, I offer no apology for their death."*

The reporter at the studio: *"We have footage from that raid, showing the total destruction of missile silos, tanks, and armories by the Regiment of Home."* A two minute selection of scenes from the record is played. Then the scene shifts back to Muriel, in front of

her office, the sign on her window clearly visible.

*"It is my hope that the People's Republic of China now understands that attempting to make war on Home or any of its properties is useless. We are more than capable of defending ourselves from attack, and more than willing to spank a country that acts like a naughty child. The People's Republic of China has been so spanked, and their toys taken away from them. They've also been made to stand in a corner until they demonstrate that they are ready to behave in a civilized manner."*

*"Ambassador Muriel, do you condone the violence and deaths that have been caused in the People's Republic of China?"*

*"When a naughty child throws a tantrum because it can't get its own way it gets spanked. When a nation throws a tantrum it's called an act of war, and in wars military personnel die. The People's Republic of China has thrown such a tantrum and been spanked for it. That spanking was administered by representatives of the People of Home, with my approval. It is bad manners to throw a tantrum and attempt to insult a head of state. They were disciplined for that. Then they decided to throw their toys at me, and have had their toys taken away – destroyed, in fact – so it won't happen again. Or, in other words, the People's Republic has demonstrated that, by their criminal behavior, they are not a part of civilized society and do not respect the lives of other people. What happens to them now is up to them. Home, and the representatives of Home, have demonstrated that they are more than capable of dealing with any nation that would behave in such a criminal manner, and have eliminated the possibility of further threats by these bullies. I do not tolerate bullies, as I've shown ever since I came to Enclave."*

*"Thank you, Madam Ambassador."*

*"We now return you to your regularly scheduled program."*

"Well, Taylor, I'd say that the 'Jolly Greens' have just shown their serious side," Ted said, casually.

"Yep. I'd say they performed adequately," he replied. The Minister of Foreign Affairs just stared at this young man sitting on the other end of the couch from him.

"Do you think this is a joke?" the Minister finally asked.

"No," Taylor quietly said, then turned to face the Minister. "No, this is no joke. War never is. But neither is armed aggression a joke. People died, there. They didn't have to. But defending ourselves against such aggression, such bullying as Muriel terms it, is more important than the lives of a few thousand that were part of that armed aggression." And Taylor's eyes blazed black.

"Um, Taylor?" Muriel said, "your rage is showing."

"Oh. Oops. Sorry, Minister. I'm not angry with you. Please forgive me," Taylor said,

his eyes returned to normal.

"I do see one potential problem," said Ted. "They are sure to bring this up in the United Nations as an unwarranted attack on their homeland."

"To late," said Mata, entering the area. "They're already doing it."

"Then it's time that their behavior was brought to the attention of these diplomats," Muriel said. "Excuse me, please."

Muriel translated to an obscure portion of the General Assembly chamber and listened for a few minutes as the Chinese delegate ranted on . . . and on. **THAT'S ENOUGH**, she finally said. **BE STILL, CHILD. YOU HAVE MISBEHAVED ENOUGH FOR ONE DAY. YOU HAVE ATTEMPTED TO BULLY ME, AND YOUR DELEGATION HAS PAID THE PRICE. THEN YOU ATTEMPTED TO KILL ME, ALONG WITH A NUMBER OF CIVILIANS. THAT IS AN ACT OF WAR AGAINST HOME AND AN ACT OF TERRORISM AGAINST UNARMED PEOPLE. WE ARE NOT SIGNATORIES TO THIS ORGANIZATION, NOR SUBJECT TO ITS APPROVAL. NOR WILL WE EVER BE. WE ARE A SOVEREIGN NATION AND WILL BE TREATED WITH RESPECT. RESPECT THAT YOU HAVE LACKED. YOUR NATION IS NOW DEFENSELESS DUE TO YOUR OWN ACTIONS.**

Muriel came out of 'hiding' and walked on air toward the podium, growing as she went until she filled the space between the floor and the ceiling of the chamber. **APPARENTLY, YOU PEOPLE LIKE BEING BULLIED. I DON'T. I'VE SEEN WHAT HAPPENS TO BULLIES WHEN THEY GET TO HOME – AND EVERYBODY GOES HOME SOONER OR LATER. THEY, JUST AS YOU WILL, FACE THE HARSHTEST, MOST CRUEL JUDGMENT THERE COULD EVER POSSIBLY BE. THEY JUDGE THEMSELVES – WITHOUT RATIONALIZATIONS, WITHOUT EXCUSES, AND VERY OFTEN WITHOUT ANY WAY TO RECTIFY THE WRONGS THEY'VE DONE TO OTHERS. THE GUILT AND SHAME SUCH A JUDGMENT CAUSES – THEIR BEING UNABLE TO BALANCE THEIR BEHAVIOR – CAUSES THEIR SOUL TO SUICIDE. NO CONTINUATION OF LIFE AFTER DEATH. NO SECOND CHANCES TO LEARN. NO COMFORT THAT AT LEAST THEY TRIED.**

**YOU**, she said, **YOU PEOPLE OF CHINA WILL FACE SUCH A JUDGMENT, AND YOU WILL ULTIMATELY DIE TOTALLY – BODY AND SOUL. WE, THE REPRESENTATIVES OF HOME, HAVE GIVEN YOU A CHANCE TO CHANGE, NOW. WE HAVE GIVEN YOU THE CHANCE TO LEARN TO RESPECT YOUR FELLOW MAN. YOU MAY NOT AGREE WITH HIM OR HER, BUT RESPECT IS PARAMOUNT. I HAVE SEEN BULLIES THAT HAVE DONE LESS THAN YOU DIE BECAUSE OF THEIR GUILT AND SHAME. WE ARE NOT AT FAULT FOR YOUR GUILT. WE ARE NOT AT FAULT FOR YOUR SHAME. IT IS OF YOUR OWN DOING, AND YOU ARE THE ONES THAT WILL ULTIMATELY PAY THE PRICE OF IT.**

Muriel translated out of the chamber. When she arrived back at her office, she handed a disk to Mata, then went to her office. "Well, that's torn it. We just put the whole world on notice."



"Not the first time," Ted said. "We've let people know before that we wouldn't accept the nonsense. Look at what we did to North Korea when it threatened to bomb American cities with nukes. Besides, you haven't heard the latest. There are reports of mass desertions from the Chinese army. People are trying to flee the country with whatever they can carry on their backs. There are others that are starting to march on the government with meat cleavers and sickles, and any other sharp implement they can get their hands on."

"By the way," Taylor said, "we took out their navy, too."

"Ouch. They have nothing. And with the mass exodus, I'll be surprised if they end up with a quarter the population that they had to start with," Ted replied.

"That would mean that a lot of them are going west, through Kazakhstan into Russia," the Minister said. "I need to make a phone call and let people know," he added, pulling his phone out and speed-dialing. He spoke, in Russian, for a couple of minutes, then put it away and said, "They know. They've mobilized to stop them at the border of Kazakhstan and China."

"Could they be going into India?" asked Muriel.

"Not bloody likely," Taylor said. "Not after all the threats and encroachment that China has pulled. They'd see it as a move to grab more land."

"Hmm. Yes. There aren't many places that will accept them. In fact," Ted said, "most places are violently opposed to their coming into the country. Tibet was the exception, but they didn't have much choice. We could see a blood-bath, here, folks."

"Is there anything we can do to stop it?" asked Muriel.

"Nope. And don't blame yourself, either one of you. That means you, too, Taylor. Muriel was prepared to make the strike on China, too," Ted said. "You just beat her to it. No, the best we can hope for is that they are turned back at the border, and that causes them to go after the people that actually caused this mess. Their government."

"What are you saying?" asked Muriel.

"That the people of China have been living under an iron fist for a long time. The reaction of some of them was to flee. Others decided to take the law into their own hands," Ted said. "Literally. If those trying to flee are turned back, then there won't be any doubt about a change in government. I don't know what it would become, but it certainly wouldn't be the same."

"They'd need a leader," Muriel said. "And I don't think Russia has enough forces in the area to be able to turn them all back."

"They'll have to find their own leader," Ted said.

“Ted. You have something in mind, and you're trying very hard to be mysterious and get me to actually make the suggestion,” Muriel said. “Well, I'm not playing your game. If you have a suggestion, then make it. Otherwise, shut up and quit trying to make me feel worse.”

“I'll do one better. After all, it's probably time that I was as outrageous as you,” he said, and translated out.

“Holy CRAP!” Mata said, a few minutes later. “OK, I think Ted just outdid you two Juvenal Delinquents. What the heck is he using, though?”

“What? Why? What do you mean,” asked Muriel.

“Well, if the reports I've got are right, he's got a line of people, but giant sized, on the border facing back into mainland China and glowing. Sounds like he's using Envoys from Home to create a barrier. I'm not sure, though. We're getting this feed off the chatter on the Russian military circuits. Wait . . . OK, he's definitely turning them back, and it sounds like he's using a massed shield, because some people are trying to go between the figures, and can't get through,” Mata said.

“What did that man do, now?” Muriel asked.

“That's what he usually asks about you, Muriel,” Bart said with a grin as he came into her office.

“You're not helping, you know,” Muriel said.

“Oh, I'm supposed to be helpful?” he asked. Muriel just growled at him, and he laughed. “Well, actually, they're not Envoys. Oh, he could have used them. Nope, he got ahold of Sergeant Carter and asked him to remind the military that they were actually Envoy souls, and that they'd simply been in human bodies. All the techniques came back to them, then. So, what he's got on the line are the PRC military dead. They're sending in a forced send that the people should go back and make the changes themselves, and not rely on others to do it for them.”

“Wait! I didn't know they could do that.”

“Neither did anyone else,” Bart said. “But think about it. Humans have been told for so long that they couldn't do things like that. It wasn't until you realized the connection and Art confirmed it that anyone understood what had happened. The infant human mind can't hold all the pattern of what an Envoy is. So, portions of it are repressed. They were supposed to open up on their own as the child developed, including the realization of how to use the techniques and the responsibility that goes with it. Now, we're having to patch up the system and apply the techniques from the outside.”

“So, you're saying that there really should have been a phase three series of humans, and that the experiment got stopped by the parasite?”

"Yep," Bart said. "Something like that, anyway. You remember when you trained Dave? That he felt that he wasn't so much finding the power as remembering it was there and re-connecting to it? Or, at least, connecting the human side of himself to it? Well, it's deeper than that. What happened was that the soul was still connected to the power. But the body wasn't. It was supposed to connect over time, a trickle at first, that built up with age, to allow the human body and mind to accept it and shape it. That was the part that they didn't think all the way through, so it didn't happen. The human mind is dominant in the merge, and human experience and knowledge controls the joined body and soul."

"Well," he went on, "that dominance continues after the death of the body. Unfortunately. That's why returned souls were unable to act like full Envoys. Ted started to come to the realization of that about a year ago, and talked to Caleb and Sergeant Carter. And they started a program of getting those that Carter thought would be most receptive to acknowledge that they were actually Envoys with human experience. It's almost like training humans, here. And it's taking hold. Carter started with what he knew, of course, which was military. That's what Ted has on the line."

"Telling tales out of school, Bart," Ted said. He'd apparently been there for a while as Bart talked and held the attention of the rest.

"These are your fellow workers in the field, Ted. Don't you think it's about time they knew what you'd been up to?" Bart asked. "It's not like it would harm you in any way."

"Well, in any case, it's working. Sergeant Carter started the retraining with American troops, then quickly realized that, in Home, there really weren't the national divisions. So, he trained a cadre in how to re-awaken the connection, or re-apply it, or something – we're still trying to work out the terminology – and they've been taking it beyond that," Ted said. "So, when I put in the call, there was quite a mass of military that were ready to act. Now, he's started changing how he comforts the new arrivals, trying to get them reconnected to their Envoy side to help with their balance. Caleb knows about it, and approves. He feels even more strongly, now, that getting humans trained here could save that step there."

"And that's what you're using on the border?" asked Muriel.

"Yep. Especially the Chinese military. They were eager to make amends for what they'd done in life," Ted said. "The rest are made up from the ranks of other military from the world. Oh, I see what you mean. No, they're simply there to provide a barrier and instructions to the fleeing people. They're even using compassion. They understand the plight of the people. Leaders in those fleeing are beginning to show up, even though the main body of them hadn't reached the border."

"And just how large are these glowing giants?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, about fifty feet," Ted said "I wanted them to be seen from a distance, to stop people from reaching the border. Some few did, and discovered the barrier shield. In all, I estimate that only a few hundred managed to cross before the barrier went up, and they're mostly farmers and their families that lived near the border."



“The evidence is that it's working,” Mata said. “They're turning back. Some to their homes, some to go on to the various government levels, including the local ones. I'd say they're sorting it out pretty well.”

“Well, then, all we can do is sit back and watch what happens. It's good to hear that souls that have been in human bodies are being reconnected to their Envoy side, though. Now, the question will be 'will the reestablishment of the connection carry on to future embodiments?' It would be good if they did,” Muriel said.

“That would involve changing how the limits were placed on the soul being embodied,” Ted said. “They're working on that, too. So, like you say, now it's just watch and wait.”

# Chapter 3

## The Consent of the Governed

(Tuesday morning)

“Well, Minister, I believe that takes care of your problem,” said Muriel.

“Yes,” said the Russian diplomat. “But wasn't it something like swatting a fly with a bomb? You do not believe in diplomacy?”

“Diplomacy. Isn't that the art of lying to each other until one side caves in?” she asked with a lopsided grin. “Seriously, sir, they rejected diplomatic means right off the bat. I'd have said that they saw a young female and figured they could intimidate her, except that they would have pulled the same stunt on Ted. You've seen it, yourself, I'm sure. Bullying is part of their culture. So is lying.”

“But . . . you know they'll kill their government representatives, now, don't you?”

“Possibly. Probably,” Muriel said. “To paraphrase a political statement, no government is legitimate without the consent of the governed. Actually, the quote I'm thinking of was voiced by John Locke, and is part of the Declaration of Independence of this country, and way too long for a mere girl to quote,” she said in obviously false humility. “I'm sure you've seen governments, current and past, that have been considered legitimate, but where the population had no say as to what laws were enacted or how the government behaved. The problem with the 'consent of the governed' is that it can be overruled in reality by the use of force. And this is what has happened in the PRC, as well as many other places. So, who is to say that their government was actually legitimate? Now, the people are on equal footing with their political leaders, because those leaders chose to try to use force to get their way with another nation, and that nation, Home, fought back. And now, those leaders have no force to use against their own people.”

“Yes,” she continued, “they may kill the current leaders. If so, they will be defending themselves against a bully of tremendous size that has used the threat, and sometimes the reality, of force to control the population. In my view, that's slavery. So what they do with their leaders doesn't bother me at all. No, what bothers me is 'what will they have for a government afterward.' That's the real question and we won't know the answer until they do.”

“And, do you have the consent of the governed, young lady?” the Minister asked.

“Yes and no. I have their consent to be their leader. I didn't campaign for the position. I had no power base to influence the People of Home. They chose me of their own free will, and against all my expectations. However, I also don't govern, and can be replaced at a moment's notice by those same people. I simply happen to be going in a particular direction that they approve, and they're following me,” she said.

"You don't govern?" he asked.

"Nope. Home has no laws. It doesn't need them. Enclave has exactly one, and a police force to enforce it. Breaking the peace is against the law. Usually Bob only warns people, or sometimes pulls them in and lets them cool off. But that's unusual. One could make a case for the Chinese missiles 'breaking the peace', I suppose, since an act of war is definitely breaking the peace," Muriel said.

"Well, I should probably be going," the Minister said.

"I'm sorry we couldn't come to an agreement," Muriel said, smiling.

"Agreement!" the Minister of Foreign Affairs snorted. "None was needed. You ignored our request, did what you wanted to, and achieved far more than what we would have asked. I'd say we got what we wanted from this."

"Well, you realize that the border won't be protected forever. Once things stabilize in there, Ted will pull the troops. I would suggest that, when the border opens up, you offer your help to the 'new nation'. I'll suggest the same to any of the countries that we've got Enclaves in, as well as offering our own aid," Muriel said. "It'll do two things right off the bat. First, it will show us what direction the new government intends to take. And second, it will potentially make a friend. Would you like transportation directly back to Russia? We can offer you that."

"You can do that? But what about customs?"

"Call your office and let them know. Besides, it'll take me a minute to create a set of DVDs to show that you tried and were turned down, then what happened after that."

"No need," Mata said. "I've already called them and made arrangements with your government. And here are the DVDs. So, you're free to go whenever you like. Or stay overnight, here, as our guest, and leave in the morning."

"Why . . . ?"

"Oh, we do that for anyone that has business with us. Even if the business doesn't work out. We're not ogres, Minister," Muriel said. "Yes, we have some abilities that most people don't. But really, we prefer to get along with people. After all, everyone goes to Home sooner or later. It helps if they're not afraid when they get there."

"And you say the people of Home follow you?"

"Ask Mata. The Envoys back us. She'll tell you."

"You mean . . . ?"

"Yes, Minister, I'm an Envoy. Most of the ones in here, with the exception of the ones in the casual area of Muriel's office space that look like young adults, are Envoys," Mata said.

"We're not Bug Eyed Monsters, or anything. We look human, for the most part. We just don't have any real body."

"I should probably go back now. I've imposed on your hospitality long enough," the Minister said.

"Oh, it hasn't been an imposition. Putting you up in Guest House is normal behavior for us. And we've enjoyed having you here, even if we couldn't come to an agreement on your mission," Muriel said, grinning. "However, I believe we achieved the results you wanted without the agreement. Chuck?"

"On it. Minister, we didn't want to pack your glass in your suitcase, so we made up a special container for it," Chuck said, bringing a box with him that sported the Home logo on a green background. "If you'll allow me, I'll clean this and put it in the box for you." He exchanged the box for the glass, and disappeared for a moment. When he returned, the glass was clean, and Chuck showed him how to open the box and inserted the glass. "There you go, sir. All ready to go."

"Minister, Mata tells me that, despite the hour, the President would like to see you in his office. Because you haven't had time to make arrangements for transportation from there to your home, I'll go with you and make sure you get home safely," Muriel said. "Mata and one squad will go with us. She never lets me out with strange men without a security squad. But since none of us are armed, that shouldn't be a problem."

"You will . . . ."

"Of course. Why not? Besides, it might help if I demonstrate to him that we have no animosity toward Russia," she said. "And your President might like a glass like yours. So, if you're ready."

They translated directly to the President's office. "Sergei," the Minister of Commerce said.

"Pyotr," the President replied. "Would you introduce us?"

"Sergei, may I present the Leader of Home, Muriel. Muriel, the President," he said.

"Well, I think that was backward," Sergei said. "But welcome to Russia, anyway, Madam."

"Just Muriel, please, Sergei. Titles get in the way. Especially at this level," Muriel said in flawless Russian. "We've taken the liberty of supplying you with a record of the events and discussion that went on in Enclave, so that you can understand that Pyotr did his job. That his mission failed was not his fault. In a nutshell, you no longer need to fear the Chinese. They made a mistake. They fired missiles at Enclave. They no longer have anything with which to wage war."

“What? How did this happen?”

“The Chinese delegation didn't want to deal with a young woman. Loudly and with attempt to insult me. I took them home in shame, stripped to their underclothes, hands tied behind their back, and with nooses around their neck, and put them in front of their national council. They decided that the appropriate action on their part was to attempt to eliminate us with nuclear missiles. The Home Regiment removed the missiles, then went to China and eliminated anything that could go bang, or that could make things that went bang,” Muriel said. The result is that a lot of people decided to become informal emigrants. Ted took some of Home's people and put them on the border to turn them back.”

“Then Pyotr didn't fail.”

“Well, actually, he did. He asked us to protect Russia from China. I refused,” Muriel said. “Home can't be aligned with any particular country. HOWEVER, Home doesn't look kindly to an act of war against it or its possessions by some bully trying to force his ways on us. So Home retaliated out of self-defense.”

Sergei just looked at her for a moment, then the laughter began to build, until finally it was rolling out of him. “You say that Pyotr's mission failed, yet you've done even more than we asked,” he finally said.

“Yes, but not for you. We did it for ourselves. The world has just been put on notice that armed aggression against Home will be met with the total elimination of its ability to make war. Instead of doing this for you, I made a target of myself, and they obligingly decided to take some target practice. This target fights back,” Muriel said, with finality but smiling. “We are NOT defenseless, despite the way we seem. In any case, while Pyotr was with us we treated him to tea. We thought you might like a tea glass like the one we gave him,” she said, presenting the box and showing him how it opened.

“Oh, my. This deserves a place of honor,” Sergei said, opening the box. “I will have to have a shelf built.”

“Where would you like it,” Frank asked.

“Eh?”

“Oh, Frank does cabinetry work,” Muriel said. “Does it very well, too. So, what would you like, and where would you like it?”

“You can do that? But it takes time to create things like that!” said Sergei.

“Not the way the Envoys do it. How about something like this?” Frank asked, handing the Prime Minister a solid, wooden shelf with space for the glass and the box, and with a carving above it commemorating the meeting of he and Muriel. It was all oak, and given a finish that made it look like gold. “So,” Frank added, “where would you like it?”

The stunned Prime Minister looked at it, at the figures of both he and Muriel above the shelf, with her giving the box to him. He held it, examined it with awe, and handed it back to Frank. Then, he vaguely gestured to a wall, and Frank mounted it.

"The glass is meant to be used," Muriel said, quietly. "A small token of our admiration of your people. Perhaps, sometime, we could train a few in Envoy techniques, so that you could have your own Enclave in this country."

"Strings?"

"Never," Muriel replied. "A gift is just a gift. Even the training is a gift. Oh, it serves our purpose to give it. But it is just a gift, given willingly and with joy."

"Why?"

"We have some evidence that the only difference between Envoys and humans is that humans have bodies, and that humans were meant to have the training a long time ago. But something went wrong, and the two were separated for many centuries. We are trying to make up for that, now, by spreading the training to as many humans as are able to take it," Muriel said. "In addition, we've developed ways of teaching that surpass anything that any nation has. And Envoy techniques are incorporated in many disciplines. It's how I'm able to speak to you in your own language, for example."

"Can you give me examples of what can be done with this training?" Sergei asked.

"I can, but it's easier to tell you what the training is," replied Muriel, and she began her spiel concerning the training. As she finished, she added, "After that, it's pretty much up to the individual. We made astounding strides in what could be done in just a few months. And all of the advances were made by humans finding new ways to use the basics. Examples are things like improved shields that will stand up to anything, improved training techniques – both for the basic Envoy training and for things like college courses, better anchors that allow us to fly – which spawned an exciting airborne game with speeds up to about a hundred and fifty miles an hour. The improved training techniques allowed us to create medical courses, either first aid or full courses, that even a twelve year old could handle – and did."

"What about weapons?"

"Yes, we have two or three. But if you're thinking of using them for aggression, then you're out of luck. Nobody with aggression as a personality trait would be able to pass the basic test – the mental link. The use of weapons for defense, of course, causes no problems with the balance," Muriel said. Then added, "Maybe an explanation of what the balance is would help you. Balance simply means that if you do something to harm someone there has to be a very good reason for it – not just a rationalization – or you have to try to make some sort of restitution. That's what the judgment is all about when you go to Home. And it doesn't matter HOW you go to Home. As long as you get there, the judgment happens. And that judgment – that showing you how balanced or unbalanced you are, colors everything you do, afterward."

“Envoys are basically protectors and nurturers,” Mata said. “We can't kill except in extremely specific situations. Humans can. It's part of the body thing – the fact that they're omnivores. Unfortunately, that also leads to the possibility of aggression against other humans. Wanting to take from other humans by whatever means, whether physical violence, or social, political or religious bullying, puts a human on the down side of the balance. It's all aggression. But defending one's self, or one's family or nation actually puts you on the positive, the up side, of the balance. Does that help?”

“Yes . . . yes, I think it does,” Sergei said. “But why is it that aggressive people can't make a mental link?”

“Think about it for a minute,” Muriel said. “To make a mental link, you have to open your mind to another person. Aggressive people won't do that for fear that they'd be found out. Or, they have secrets that they don't want others to know about. I don't mean like the sorts of secrets that a diplomat or leader might hold about upcoming events or such. I mean personal things, like what kind of person he is, and how dangerous he would be to others.”

“That makes sense. So, because they have these hidden things that they don't want others to know, they can't or won't make the mental link,” Sergei said.

“Yep. That's about it,” said Muriel.

“Do you realize that by explaining the balance to me you've made me examine my own life?” he asked.

“Well, that's always a possibility. But I've had people, over the past four years, that were obviously aggressive people, that listened to that and still tried to take the first test. And failed.”

“They thought they could get away with it?”

“Yea, but their subconscious wouldn't let them,” Muriel said. “We've had good luck with young people, though. Twelve to fourteen years of age. They also go through the judgment easier. But that's not to say that adults can't do it. We've had a number that have, particularly in the police, military, and health fields, as well as others. Basically, those that are protectors by nature seem to do the best.”

“How would you set it up?” asked Sergei.

“There are two ways it can be done. One is to let us establish an Enclave here. The first step in that is to find someone that can take the training to be the Ambassador for Home to head the Enclave. We'd help him or her set up an Enclave that suited your society and culture, and use it to draw in interested people. The second way is more difficult, and that's to canvas schools for students in the age range I suggested, or hospitals, police, fire, or religious organizations. But then you'd be having people from outside your country training your people.”



“Can I contact you with an answer?”

“Of course. Oh, here – here's my card. The number will either reach me directly or will reach Mata if I'm busy or sleeping. I DO need sleep, despite what SOME people think,” Muriel said, looking at Mata. Mata just laughed

# Chapter 4

## Little Mother

(Tuesday afternoon)

Muriel translated back to her office to find bedlam. "What's going on?" she asked.

"It's started! I can't believe it. It all started with one woman. One little mother that tried to get her child to the other side of the border," Ted said. "She wouldn't turn back, despite the guard, despite the barrier, until the guard told her a better way to deal with it. He taught her. It took half the night, but he taught her, and she's been teaching others. And they're teaching still others. It's gone into a geometric progression, almost a logarithmic progression of people being taught!"

"Why? How did it happen?"

"He knew her. She didn't know him, but he knew her. She was his younger sister. And she'd been too young when he was killed to remember him. He took pity on her, and taught her!"

"So, the training has gone wild, now," Muriel said. "NOW what do we do?"

"We wait. We watch. You can bet that the Envoys are. But it looks promising. They're using shields to create small enclosures to protect them from rain, and to warm them. They're using shields to create clothing, and somebody has caught the trick of creating real food, and is passing that along through a mental net," Ted said. "I think this was what was expected, originally. We've created an artificial way of doing it. They're doing it on their own, in the wild," he added, with admiration.

"OK, I'm going to make a suggestion," Muriel said. "Get ahold of the original trainer, break him out of there and replace him, or readjust the line. Put him in Mata's or Bart's position, as security chief to an Ambassador. Have him 'suggest' whatever markings that would be appropriate to the culture, and give him the knowledge of how to make them visible only to those with training, or when the person wants everyone to see. And teach him how to make the passports."

"What are you intending?" asked Ted.

"To make an Enclave out of a country. This is an explosive situation – a country in flux. Get the protectors protected so they can't be coerced, threatened, or bullied, and they'll take care of those that are that way," Muriel replied.

"It won't work, Muriel. As soon as one village has trained all it's trainable people, it'll stop."

“Wanna bet?” she said. “Even primitive societies had a small population that would trade with other villages. I’m betting that they have something similar as far as contact. Oh, and get Envoys into the hospitals. Envoys trained in Envoy medicine, before we start losing people!”

“OK, OK, I’ll do it. Calm down.”

“Relax, Ted. As soon as I saw the shape of what she was suggesting, I called out the Marines. Literally. Sergeant Carter knows which ones have taken the medical training, and is already sending them. They’ve turned their dress uniforms white, and added the appropriate symbol for medical to them. Two squads per hospital. One squad does triage, and the other has started on the worst ones. Once the life threatening cases are cleared, the triage group will start at the next level, and they’ll leapfrog each other.”

“Power, water, phone, MEDIA! We need to get the word out to as many people that have stayed to stay put and wait for help,” Muriel said.

“Already covered. Sergeant Carter thought of that, and is already mobilizing them,” Mata said in a calm, quiet voice.

“NOW all we can do is wait. Unless somebody has some better suggestions . . . .”

“What about Embassies?” asked Bart, that had joined the group.

“Good question. I’ll ask about the American Embassy, and we’ll work from there,” Muriel said, and contacted Melanie. In moments, she came back into focus and said, “Melanie already sent one of her troops over, and the Embassy is encapsulated. Britain did the same thing, but with a couple of Home Regiment troops. One of them is an Envoy style doctor. They’re both checking with other Embassies to see that they’re protected, and sending in Envoy trained personnel where necessary. France’s is OK. So are a few others.”

Chuck came in with a tray holding a glass of milk and a sandwich. “Oh, not now, Chuck.”

“Now,” he replied. “You need it for the nourishment, and for the distraction. Eat, young lady.”

Another tray was brought in for Ted. And they waited and ate. Neither one knew what they were eating, nor did they care. But biting sandwiches beat biting finger nails. Finally, with no further information, they decided to try to find other things to occupy them. Like work. Ted went back to his office to check on things there, and took Bart with him.

Muriel translated to the Triple E offices to check on the companies under its umbrella. She already knew that the car manufacturing company Home owned had flourished. Crash tests had sent the investigators into tizzies. It disturbed them that, not only couldn’t the car that Jeff designed be wrecked, but the crash dummies seemed to defy the laws of inertia – they didn’t move when the car crashed OR when something crashed into it. It didn’t hurt that,

once you bought the car you never had to 'gas it up', or plug it in. It just ran.

Things had gone so well with the car that they'd branched out to pickup trucks and sport utility vehicles. They now had four models of each, and there was a waiting list for new ones as soon as they could be made. One of the SUVs had actually braved the Rubicon Trail, and had made a good appearance. They had managed to reduce the number of foreign owned or imported cars in America by an order of magnitude. Their next big challenge was heavy trucks – tractor-semi-trailers and straight trucks in excess of ten thousand pounds.

Software had likewise flourished. Making the changes in the code and lowering the price had allowed more people the ability to afford it, and they more than made up for the difference in price by the volume of software they moved. They'd also tackled the operating system, and straightened out the bugs in it, made it more secure and better organized. There were now four operating systems competing on merits – UNIX, Linux, Mac, and the one that Triple E owned. UNIX was dying out, since it really hadn't been upgraded in years. Mac was a walled garden – to get the Mac operating system you had to buy their hardware, and were locked into their applications or those few that they allowed to run on their system. Linux had gone through a long, hard struggle to prove that it WASN'T UNIX, only acted like it. And the one that Triple E owned had only flourished because of almost illegal – and in some cases outright illegal – practices of contracts with Original Equipment Manufacturers to ONLY install their operating system on computers. Now, it was changing.

Then there were movies. Taking over a studio and stopping the ridiculous lawsuits that were bleeding it dry was a start. But it was when they took a tip from a cable channel and started making mini-series of popular books and putting them on the Internet that it really took off. They also did news programming that rivaled the original networks for popularity and were much more unbiased and factual in their reporting. Advertising revenue was up, even though they didn't stop every ten minutes for five minutes of ads. Instead, they had one five minute segment of ads at the beginning of the program, and that was it.

Slowly, the surplus income from the Triple E companies was making it possible to buy more companies and take them private, where they did much better than they had as publicly traded companies. This really wasn't a surprise to Muriel. Without 'investors' telling businesses what to do and demanding enormous profits, the companies were able to concentrate on quality and dependability. That, and making the prices reasonable, were making Triple E a household name. Unfortunately, it had also created a small rash of lawsuits from competitors that couldn't believe that something so simple as getting rid of greedy investors and ridiculous lawsuits could so improve a company that it did better than those competitors. But that was now past. The first one that went to the Supreme Court had pretty much killed them. Paraphrased, the verdict from the Supremes was that nothing in law guaranteed any company a profit. They'd have to compete on their own merits.

Things were better, legally, in the country, too. The President had survived an election for a second term based on the positive changes that had been affected under his administration. With the elimination of a splinter party driving the attitudes and opinions of a major political party, Congress had calmed down and started actually doing its job. In addition, corporations had been rebelled against, and the Supremes had been finally

convinced that, if a 'person' couldn't be put in jail for a crime, then it wasn't a person. That precedent had only been enacted to allow corporations to sue or be sued. They found another way to make that possible, so that corporations could enforce contracts. That had stopped the ridiculous practice of companies and 'super packs' buying political elections. It had also trimmed the sails of lobbyists. They weren't quite made illegal, but they were no longer allowed to contribute to election funds or provide Congressmen with 'benefits' and 'gifts'. Congress was having to listen to it's REAL constituents again – the people. And to think that it only took a near disaster to convince them of that.

Banks were another thing. One of the first things rammed through Congress was that ANYBODY trading on Wall Street or the Commodities markets had to be registered, and obey the SEC rules and regulations. And the banks screamed. Computer programmed trades were outlawed, and the banks screamed louder. The President let them scream, then quietly released a finding that the officers and board of directors of the banks were the only ones that really profited, and that it was the banks that had been forcing the nation into recession after recession. Then, he got regulations applied to the banks, and three major ones went out of business. That didn't last long. As soon as their stock dropped to pennies on the dollar, Triple E bought them, and put them under one name. And they began to flourish, too.

Wall Street was beginning to get the point, but, of course, were taking it the wrong way. Triple E was still a private corporation – Muriel had no intention of taking it public – so Wall Street traders were trying to make it illegal to operate a business that wasn't publicly traded. Since the wording of their 'proclamation' would have meant that even mom and pop stores and restaurants would have to be public, it didn't stand a chance of passing Congress.

Patents and copyrights were still a mess. Some advances had been made, but it was taking some real training – as well as firing a bunch of people in the patent and trademark office – to get them to realize that patents that weren't clearly defined IN PLAIN ENGLISH were not legitimate. Part of the problem were the patent lawyers that liked their guaranteed income. So far, the only thing that had been enacted was that if you weren't producing a product that used a patent, you couldn't try to enforce it. That put patent trolls out of business and slowed down the amount of litigation.

Patents on natural occurrences and mathematical structures had proliferated to the point where greedy people were patenting genetic structures and software algorithms. This resulted in certain medical and agricultural products and almost all software being priced out of the range of ordinary people to purchase. This had its political side, too. Corporations had been 'buying' laws supporting these ideas both directly through lobbyists and indirectly through 'campaign donations'. Some of it had been trimmed by making such gifts to politicians illegal, but litigations still ran amok, and the companies were still making outrageous fortunes.

Copyrights were another matter. Some idiot had decided that all countries should have the same copyright laws, and had forced European countries to up their limits to match the ridiculous American limits. This had caused a bunch of copyrighted works that had become Public Domain works to suddenly be pulled back into the black hole of copyrights. Unfortunately, not all countries were signatories of such treaties, and this made a total mess

out of trying to figure out whether a work was or was not in the public domain.

One attempt to circumvent publishers and movie studios from just ripping off a person's work was the creation of what was called the Creative Commons License. An author who wanted to put a work out to the public without putting it in the public domain could use this license to make it freely available. Slowly, publishers and movie studios were being forced to accept that there were just some practices that they'd have to do without. But that didn't cure the mess, it just made it more confusing.

The problem, with both patents and copyrights, stemmed from the fact that they were opposite sides of the same coin, and that whole industries had grown up around their misuse. Patents were meant to protect the application of a working idea. Originally an inventor had to submit a working model of the patented device. When submitting a physical model was phased out, it resulted in things like business methods and practices being able to be patented, and from there to software patents. Copyrights, on the other hand, were supposed to protect against the literal copying of literature, music and art. Software, or at least portions of it, were considered 'literature'. And then the lawyers got ahold of the idea of business methods and concepts from patents and managed to work that into the software definition, fragmenting the software to the point where a few lines out of millions of lines of code could be considered infringing all of the code. This made millions for the copyright holders – and lawyers – but was essentially meaningless in the real world because there were so few ways that some portions of software could be written.

Then the lawyers really got going, and software was both copyrighted and patented, and the trolls came out from under the bridge. Even without the advent of the trolls, though, just the litigations from one company using patents and copyrights as a means of creating a monopoly for an idea overloaded courts, caused unnecessarily high prices for products, and made the public into the goose that laid the golden egg. And what happens when the goose dies? So does the source of the golden eggs. People stopped buying because they no longer had the money to afford what, in some cases, were beneficial to their lives. And all of this driven by the greed of companies and banks – Wall Street.

The cars that Jeff designed were caught up in the situation. The drawings were copyrighted, and the methods of construction were patented. But . . . nobody could duplicate the methods without having the Envoy training. So, Jeff followed the normal procedures for creating the patents and copyrights, then allowed other companies to see them, and they couldn't do a thing with them without having the Envoy training. They tried. But Jeff and the head of the Maintenance section at Enclave proved that you couldn't use ordinary methods of construction to replace Envoy techniques effectively. So, other companies ended up getting Envoy training for both their engineers and their assembly line crews just to stay in business. And Jeff cheerfully sold the nonexclusive rights to use his copyrights and patents at a modest fee to those companies – but not the training itself. That was still free. And he stayed at least a step ahead of the other companies, turning out what amounted to luxury workhorses for vehicles at much less than the cost of a car or truck made by 'normal' means.

It was all so convoluted and confusing. Alice had tried, a number of times over the past four years, to explain it to her, but so much of it went against logic and rational thought

that it eluded Muriel. It was enough, to her, that the companies were performing as she'd suggested – quality products, shared information, cooperation between companies and without the dirty tricks that others had used. And a visit to Frederica showed that that was still the case, and the companies were making money. Even the most recently acquired ones, even the banks, were making reasonable amounts of money. And, without the need to pay out large sums of money to shareholders or board members, most of that money could go right back into the company and make it better.

Muriel translated back to her office, exhausted, but only partly because of the round of questions she had concerning the companies. Mostly, it was because of the China affair wearing on her. There still wasn't any word on what was happening, there, beyond what information they'd received already. The one positive note that kept her hopeful was that many of the population were getting trained in Envoy techniques, and would thus have the balance to help sustain them as well as the shields to protect them from those that didn't have the Envoy training.

“Mata, when you said that people in China had caught onto the trick of making real food, what did you mean,” Muriel asked from her recliner.

“Oh. I thought you knew,” Mata said. “Sorry. You know how Frank made that shelf for the Prime Minister? That's real wood. It has a physical component that's the same as oak. It also has a shield built into it, so it can't be damaged. Same with the glasses that were made. Real silver and glass, but with a shield built in. Well, food is the same way, except without the shields. How do you think Chuck could come up with tuna salad sandwiches on the spur of the moment for you?”

“I . . . to tell you the truth, I never thought about it. I was usually so engrossed with my own thoughts that it never occurred to me how much, or how little, time elapsed between the request and his appearance with a tray. Are the restaurants the same way?”

“Of course,” said Mata. “How else? Same with the supermarkets. The Envoys studied the various individual components of human food, and learned how to duplicate it. Then others took it from there, learning how to combine those elements into meals that would please normal humans. And each Envoy that headed a restaurant specialized in different styles.”

“Oh, my. And it works for anything?” asked Muriel.

“Yep. Pretty much.”

“I'll have to get Frank and Chuck to show me how they do that. It sounds like fun. Oh, as a hobby. I wouldn't try to replace either of them. They're masters at what they do,” Muriel added.

“That they are. From years of learning what pleased you. I think they can probably create dumps of the patterns, so you won't have to spend time learning those the old fashioned way. Then, it's just a matter of learning how to apply them, yourself. We can find



people that know metal, plastic, and stone, too, if you like.”

“Oh, wow. A hobby,” giggled Muriel.

“About time.”

“Well, up until now, my work HAS been my hobby,” Muriel replied. “I just never thought about having something to do just because I wanted to. I think I’m beginning to understand why Jeff was the way he was, with all his degrees.”

“He seems to have settled down, now. Oh, he still does programming. In fact, some of the games created by our software company are actually his creations. And the programmers went gaga trying to find out how he managed the realism,” Mata said. “Why don’t you go up to your room . . . .”

“Sending me to my room, now, Mata?”

Mata snorted, “Yea, right. I didn’t even try that when you were twelve. At least not in the sense that you imply. No, I just thought that a good meal and some instruction by Chuck and Frank would help you settle down, some. There really isn’t any new information, yet. And I’ll let you know when there is.”

“OK, little mother. I’ll go. And I would like to learn how to do things,” Muriel replied, and translated out.

# Chapter 5

## Large Results

### (Wednesday Morning)

::Muriel. Muriel. I hate to wake you so early, but there's someone here to see you,::  
Mata sent.

::Hmm? Humph. Mmm. OK. A minute. Make him comfortable, and I'll be right down,::  
she replied.

Five minutes later she translated to her casual area. "I'm sorry . . . ."

"No! I sorry," said a young woman with a baby, as she bowed. "I told to come here, I not know what time is. Sorry, my English not perfect."

"You have no reason to be sorry, and certainly no reason to bow to me. I'm only a girl. I see you have had Envoy training. Won't you sit down, and can we get you something? For you or your child?" asked Muriel. Chuck came in behind Muriel, and the woman's eyes widened.

"I see what brother meant," she said. "Oh! I not supposed to know he brother. He would think failed. But I know. You," she said to Chuck, "you Envoy."

Chuck smiled and said some words in one of the Chinese dialects. The woman stood up taller and replied. Chuck said a little more, then turned to Muriel. "This will go easier, now. I've given her the English language and syntax. There may still be some words that she doesn't know or understand so, if you don't mind, I'll stay to help."

"Of course, Chuck. No problem. Please. Sit, and tell us what we can do for you," said Muriel.

"He defers to you. But he is Envoy and you are human," the woman said. "Truly, you are as I was told – a great one."

"Chuck has been with me since I came to Enclave. And I've deferred to him as much as he has to me. The Envoys call me a leader, but that's only because they're following me. They could choose another just as easily," Muriel said.

"I am Li Chun. You would say Chun Li. Chun is Spring in your language. Li is family name. I come to ask how to set up an Enclave – how to make it work for my people," Chun said.

"You say your brother told you to come here?"

“Yes. He was guard on the border. Fifty feet tall. He would not let me pass. Told me to turn back, but I wouldn't. So, he taught me how to protect myself and go places and do things. Wondrous things, I have never imagined,” Chun said. “He doesn't know I know. He was killed before I was old enough to know him. But I know. My mother told me about him, and showed me pictures.”

“He taught me, and another man came and told him to go with me and help me,” she continued. “We taught others. All day we worked teaching others. And they left to teach others still. Then he tell me to rest, and when I woke up he told me to come here. That I must learn how to set up an Enclave. That I should be a . . . ,” she spoke for a moment to Chuck in Chinese.

“Ambassador,” Chuck said. “One who represents a nation.” Then said a few words to her in Chinese.

“Ambassador,” Chun said. “Why me?”

“You were the first,” Muriel said. “The first of your country. You will have help, and you don't need to be anything but who you are, Chun. The Envoys will help you set up your Enclave, and get it running right. You know your people, and your country. You know what will make them comfortable, and what will amaze them. You know what is needed to help them, and to help them grow. They will help you make it happen.”

“Chuck, can you get hold of her brother? Without letting on that we know or she knows, of course. I think I know what this is about, and we can solve it, quickly,” Muriel asked.

“Of course, great leader . . . .” Muriel hit him. “OK, OK, I'll go. Give me some time to make sure his English is up to it, Muriel,” he said, laughing. “I'll meet him out front.” He quickly translated out.

“You hit him? He is Envoy. Isn't he greater than you?” asked Chun.

“No. He is Envoy and I am human. But humans are Envoy souls in human bodies. You know this, yourself, if you look.” Chun looked stunned. Then seemed to transform some, and straightened up. “Envoys are protectors and nurturers. And we are the Children of Home, Envoys in human bodies, meant to learn how to be creative and how to judge. I have twenty one Envoys here as security, and five more as an analysis section. And they all defer to me where it comes to making decisions. And mother me, tremendously the rest of the time, like elder brothers and sisters. They have what we want and need – the training. We have what they want and need – creativity and judgment. Yet we are the ones that are judged when we go to Home.”

“Now,” said Muriel, changing the subject. “It would be better for you both if you and he resolved this 'brother' issue. I'm not telling you to. I'm suggesting that it would be better. But I'll play it any way you want to go. You have the right to make your own decisions about this.” Her words were soft and delivered with a smile.

"Yes," said Chun. "I see. And I will do as you suggest. Especially if he is going to be working with me in the future, as he has indicated. Perhaps," she added with a grin, "my first official act as an Ambassador?"

"Definitely," Muriel grinned back.

Chuck brought her brother in, then. "Li Huang Fu, come here and greet me properly," Chun said. "Your game has gone on too long." Her words were delivered softly, and gently, and tempered with a smile. Poor Huang Fu just looked confused, and panicked. "Did you really think that you could hide it from me? I may have been too young to know you during your life, but our mother spoke of you often, and showed me pictures. You are fortunate," she said, making a bilingual pun on the English translation of his name. "You are fortunate that I recognized you, as I am fortunate that you gave me the training. Now, you and I have work to do. You sent me here to be an Ambassador. I need security, if just for show. And you will be the chief of them."

He was still panicked as he looked at Muriel and Chuck. "It's all right Huang Fu," Muriel said. "You did well, teaching her, and protecting her. Now, she has a job to do, and will need your help. Be her protector. Be her older brother and friend. I say this as the Leader of Home, that this changes nothing of your mission. It adds to it something that you both lacked. Go to her."

"It's true, what I've heard," he said, straightening up and addressing Muriel. "You are different. You know. You understand. How can I help her with this?"

"Simple," Mata said. "In the times when she sleeps, come here and I'll teach you what I've learned from being Muriel's security chief. "She will be safe. You've seen to that. And others have taken your lead in training those they turn back. This is growing fast. The population of your country are growing impervious to the threats of your country's current leaders. Now is the time for the people to take back the country and restore it to its glory."

"It won't be easy, Huang Fu. Either for you or for Chun. But it can be done, and we will help as we can. You only have to ask," Muriel said. "Chun, there is a correction I need to make to your passport, now that you are an Ambassador," she added. "May I?"

Chun handed over her passport with some trepidation, and Muriel said, "Don't worry, you'll get it right back. Chuck, I may need help with the Chinese."

"No you won't. Look at it."

"It's in English!"

"Only to someone that speaks English. To her, it's in Chinese. I thought you knew that?" he said.

"Nope. Nobody ever bothered to tell me. EVERYBODY SPIES ON ME AND NOBODY

TELLS ME ANYTHING!" she hollered. And the room laughed. She grinned and went back to the passport. "OK, I've added diplomat to the front cover, and a certificate indicating your rank as the Ambassador from Home to the people of China. If you'd take a look? If I need to make corrections, I'll make Chuck do them. Betty, can I see you for a minute?"

"Sure," she said, translating to the casual area. "What do you need?"

"Is there a way to create a dump of what Chun will need to know as an Ambassador?"

"Oh, sure. Five minutes, and it'll unfold overnight. Well, overnight for her. It's midnight there," Betty said. "She should be good to go at around nine o'clock."

"Chun, how long can you stay?" asked Muriel.

"I should get back. There are so many to train," she said.

"They will be trained, little sister," her brother said. "Others can do what you do in training. Your absence won't be noticed or felt. But your presence as Ambassador, THAT will be felt. And perhaps you and Muriel should get to know each other better."

"We can put you up in the Guest House, and Huang Fu can help you get used to some of the things that we do. So can my off duty squads, if they don't spend all their time playing with your baby," Muriel said, looking at the off duty squads, which managed a good job of choreographed ceiling inspection. And Chun laughed.

"They are like children!" Chun exclaimed.

"Well, with me they are. But that's partly because I was still a child when I came here," Muriel said. "We tend to be casual with each other, and goof around and joke a lot. But, when I've needed support in something, they've been very professional. How you treat them is how they will treat you. As for Huang Fu," Muriel said, "I had Ted to buffer me as I learned. You will have your brother to buffer you. And he will give you advice, not orders. You will decide for yourself what is best. The down side is that if you are wrong then you will have to make some sort of restitution. The up side is that, if you listen to your balance, you won't BE wrong, no matter how outrageous you are. Ask them. They call me 'the Outrageous Ambassador', and with good reason. Sometimes, doing the unexpected and laughing at yourself can be the best solution. Other times, more direct action is appropriate. Your balance will know."

Betty touched Muriel on the shoulder, and held her eye for a minute in mental contact. "You'll need that," she said, when she broke the connection.

Ted walked in, stopped and bowed in Chinese style to Chun, then said, "You have been honored, little mother. You now have responsibilities. But you also have benefits. If you stay for a day, you will learn how to choose subordinates to carry out your will, and how to delegate to them without sacrificing your authority." His words were plain to Muriel, but strange. Then, she realized that he'd been speaking in Chinese, and she'd understood him.

"Thank you," she quietly said to Betty. Then to Chun, "Part of what you'll need to learn is done through the same mental link that Huang Fu used to teach you." She found that she was speaking Chinese, relatively well. But she didn't stop there. "What you hear is because one of my squad put your language in my head by that method, just now. She acted on her own initiative to help me, because she understands that there are times when I need help that I may not even think or know to ask for."

Ted said, "Your squads will be Envoys. They will not have had human bodies. Your brother will be the chief among them, and the bridge between you and them because he's closer to them than you are, right now. They will be your friends, your support, your family, and your protectors. Betty," and Ted indicated the education squad leader, "will give you a course in what it's like to be an Ambassador, and you will understand better what questions to ask. Please, do ask. To ask for guidance or for help is your right. There is no shame in it. We, too, are 'only human' and can make mistakes. We may not give you all you need to know because we may not know all you need to know. And there will be times when the situation is new to both of us. So ask, anytime."

Suddenly he looked startled and said, "How long has it been since your daughter was fed and changed?"

"Too long, I'm afraid," Chun replied.

"Team," called out Muriel, "we're taking over the kitchen area and the seats closest to it. You heathen men are NOT invited." Chun looked at her in surprise, then laughed. And so did the male Envoys. And it was a good-natured laugh, filled with both understanding and a joy of life.

Muriel translated them to the kitchen area, and indicated a recliner closest to it. Fran came in, handed Huang Fu something, then threw a curtain across half of the break area.

"Out of the way, infant," she said to Muriel in English. "Let somebody that has an idea of what's needed do her work." Muriel grinned, and stepped back. The recliner turned toward the kitchen, and a tray table mounted itself to the arm rests at just the right height to support a squirming baby.

"Hello, Chun," she continued, in English. "My name is Fran, and I'm a doctor. I hope you'll forgive my speaking English, but I didn't have time to learn your language before I came. These are disposable diapers, and Huang Fu has one to study so he can duplicate it. If, being only a man, he fails to do so, let me know by mental link and I'll get you more. No matter where you are." A washcloth went to the sink by itself, and returned warm and damp.

In moments, the baby girl was clean and dry, and nursing furiously, making contented grunts. And her mother had that special look on her face that mothers have for infant children. "Forgive me," Chun said. "She is the only one I'll have, and I won't have her for much longer, if the doctors are right."

“They WERE right,” Fran said. “But no longer. I handled her enough to find out what was wrong and fix it. She will live a long and healthy life and have children of her own.”

“How?”

“I’m a doctor. Envoy training, Envoy techniques. I can do more than normal doctors, especially those relegated to remote villages out in the middle of nowhere,” Fran said. She looked up and blank for a minute, then said, “I’ve asked Ted to make sure that there is a doctor in your squads. One trained in Envoy techniques, of course, since he or she would be an Envoy. Which would you prefer? Male or female?”

“Hmm? Oh, female, I think,” Chun said. “How are you people doing this?”

“Like I said. Envoy training and techniques. Your doctor will have the same techniques that I have. Maybe more, if Mark has upgraded the course, again,” Fran said. “He’s always finding new ways to do things faster and better. If so, I’ll get the updates, soon, too.”

“No, I mean . . . ALL of this! This . . . this together, yet separate. This . . . I don’t know. It is strange to me,” Chun said.

“Rest, first, Chun,” Muriel said. “Rest. Come to it, fresh. This evening, your morning, I’ll explain more.”



# Chapter 6

## The Making of an Ambassador (Wednesday evening)

"I am called the Leader of Home," Muriel began, as they settled in her casual area. "But the term is deceptive. I lead only because I'm going in a particular direction, and others are following me. I do not rule."

"But, how can that be? How can you impose your ideas, your will, if you don't rule?" asked Chun.

"I don't. They follow because they choose to. They feel that the direction I take is the way to go, so they follow."

"I don't understand," the little mother said.

"Hmm. Well, it's like this," Muriel said. "I was being picked on, bullied. I didn't like it. So, when I learned the Envoy techniques . . . no, even before I'd completed my training, others tried to bully me, and I did something about it. I stopped them. I stopped them without hurting them. Simply made it plain that I would no longer put up with their bullying. And it went from there. I saw that there were various forms of bullying. Lies that those that sought power would tell. Buying laws. Using laws to become a monopoly, or a politician of power, or a religious leader feeding off the flock he was supposed to protect. And I took them on, and I won. I won by showing others just what they were like."

"I ended up making a target of myself. At first, I thought I was being set up . . . by Ted, by the Envoys. I didn't know who. Only that I was constantly being targeted. Finally, I realized that I was the one setting myself up, but that the ones targeting me couldn't win. Ted was the leader at that time, but it was me that the Envoys were following. Then Ted was following me, too. Mostly, I think, to see what outrageous thing I would do next," she added.

"All I wanted to do," she said, almost reflectively, "was to end the bullying. To give the people a chance to advance, to learn, to grow in peace. In this country the will to power was diffuse, scattered all over the various professions. Politicians wanted power and adulation. Religious leaders used guilt to acquire power over people, and misused that power by attempting to control politics. Businesses wanted money, and were willing to buy legislation. Media wanted to shape the opinions of the ordinary people. Education wanted a monopoly on human thought because of the money they made from teaching. The medical profession wanted humans to suffer so that they could make money by only half-healing them. And none of them could see that they were actually bringing down humans instead of protecting them and helping them grow."

"But . . . this is a rich country? Wasn't there enough for everyone?" asked Chun.

"Of course there was. But those with greed wanted more. Those with a little power wanted a lot of power. These are people who don't feel the balance within themselves. Who don't realize that the very survival of humans was what they were threatening. So, when I threatened their way of life, they fought back. And slowly, public opinion moved away from them, because they were shown to be people without morals," Muriel said.

"That isn't all you did."

"No," said Muriel, "we gathered information. We found out what corruption was going on, traced it back, and then turned the information over to the proper authorities. And we made sure they WERE proper authorities, and not judges bought and paid for by the bullies. And had the bullies arrested and sent them to prison, some for the rest of their lives. We used the very laws they created to work against them. We used the financial laws and customs to drive the price of stock in companies down, then bought them up and took them private. As private companies, no longer being bled of the money they made, they became successful. We changed the attitude of the companies we bought, moving it to quality, sharing, cooperation, things like that. And with the money we made from it, bought even more companies."

"We gathered information on politicians," she added. "We found the corruption and exposed it. And, in some cases, the treason against the Constitution of the United States. And the politicians . . . most of them . . . are now in jail and will never be let out. Some religions fought us, in one case going so far as to break up a family, where the daughter was trained in Envoy techniques. And I destroyed the religion and sheltered the daughter. I do what I can to protect the everyday people, and train them when I can. I've trained police and military, and the way they behave has begun to change the whole purpose of military in this country."

"You certainly changed it in mine," Chun said. "You destroyed it."

"Yes. Your rulers decided I had to be controlled or killed. They couldn't control me, so they sent missiles to kill me," Muriel said. "Another Ambassador, from another country, took two thousand Envoy trained troops and destroyed the military complex. Now, your rulers are bottled up in one building, afraid to come out. Afraid of what the people they ruled would do to them for having used the military to force them to their will. I'm afraid that's something you will have to deal with, to protect your people. How you deal with them is between you and your balance. You will do what you feel is right," she added with confidence. "But it won't end there. These were the top of the pyramid. There are others with the will to power in your country, and you'll have to find them and neutralize them, somehow."

"You are not telling me what to do, or how to deal with them," Chun said, with some confusion.

"Of course not. That is for you to decide. And the things you decide will cause a polarization in your country – you will be able to see those that simply want peace and those with the will to power and money," Muriel replied. "Being a leader, a true leader and not a ruler, means going your own way. But you will have help. Your brother. Your squads of

Envoys. Ask them for help. Not how to do things, but for the tools to do what you feel you need to do. They'll teach you, and they'll work for you so that you don't have to do the whole thing alone."

"It is all so vague," Chun said.

"I know it seems that way. But that's because you're trying to see the whole thing at once. Pick one particular thing that needs to be done first. Do that. Then look at the next thing," Muriel said. "It'll work out. Your balance will help. The only rule with the balance is that if you make a mistake or doing something wrong, you will have to make it right. Or at least try to. Keep that in mind as you make your decisions, and it will all work out."

"Now," Muriel said, changing the subject, "education. Business management, I think, and Enclave management. What else, Betty?"

"Philosophy, Tommy's way. It's a short course. Huang Fu has the others she might need, and can get any that she wants and needs beyond that just by contacting me. So, Chun, I want you to just relax and think of nothing. If it helps, you can close your eyes, or you can look at me, look at a blank space on the wall, look at the blank look on Muriel's face," Chun giggled, "or anything you like as long as you don't try to think of anything. OK?"

"Yes," said Chun, and looked at Betty. Five minutes later, it was done.

"Good, that's it. Huang Fu already knows how to create records, and he'll show you when you need to do it. That's simple," said Betty. "Anything else you can think of?"

"Yes," Chun said. "Chinese. Educated Chinese, so I don't speak like a peasant. More will listen to me, then."

"Ah, now that one is easy, and will open up right away," Betty said, and delivered it.

"Good. That is good," Chun said with a smile. "What about clothes. What I wear would mark me as a peasant. You wear a kind of suit," she said to Muriel. "So do your Envoys. Why?"

"Well, for me, they're easier to wear and more comfortable. But I wasn't worried about style so much as something that was totally different," Muriel said.

"Well, I should be woman . . . a woman. But, your idea has merit. You are saying that I should set my own style, and that it should be distinctive," Chun said.

"Only if you are comfortable with that. You need to project an image that is you, more than anything."

"Oh, I think I can manage that," she said, as she set her daughter on the couch and placed the wrap she used to carry it between the baby and the edge of the couch. Then she stood up, closed her eyes and thought for a moment. She opened her eyes, and suddenly

was wearing a dark blue tunic over white pants. The tunic was longer than the normal Chinese men's tunic, but had the same knot-work buttons, and was emblazoned with a Chinese dragon. "I know," she said, "it is a male symbol. But it is also the symbol of royalty. Brother, you should be the crane, for longevity. And," she added to Muriel, "you say I will have four squads?"

"You can have more, if you wish. I was given four, and ended up with a fifth because of the abilities of an Envoy I rescued," Muriel said.

"Four is good. Four is the four corners of the earth. But the symbols. Hmm. You have mixed gender squads. Could I have them same gender within the squad?"

"No reason why not. I was used to working with mixed groups due to my friends. You have different circumstances and different ways. Set them up to suit yourself. As it stands, we tried to select for various abilities, as well as their ability to act as security for you," Muriel said, grinning. She was beginning to see the weight of responsibility descend on the woman, and along with it the dignity she would need to pull it off. "Why don't we go outside, and you can get to know them. I'm sorry, but there wasn't room in here."

"Don't be sorry, Muriel. What you have done is wonderful. I begin to see the shape of what you have given me, and the ways it can be used to help my people."

"If you will permit," Betty said, "I'll be happy to watch your child."

"Oh, that would be a blessing. Thank you. Hmm, yes, Muriel, I'm learning. One of the ways you showed respect to your Envoys was to be polite and thank them for what they do. Yes. That is good. And comfortable with me." She smiled up at Muriel. "There will definitely be changes. Starting with my brother, I think. Huang Fu, you're out of uniform. Black over white, and with the Crane. Yes, better. Thank you. Now, let's see the squads."

As they went toward the doors, they whooshed out of the way. Chang continued without a pause, but not without a comment. "You even teach your doors respect, I see. They get out of the way rapidly for you." Muriel laughed at the image of doors being scared enough to get out of the way of her.

"You are the first," Muriel said, "that hasn't paused when they whooshed like that."

"Ah, but I cheated. I saw others come in and out, so I knew it would happen," Chun grinned. And Muriel laughed. As Chun approached the first squad, male, she said, "White tiger, on white tunic." The next, female, she said, "Phoenix on red tunic." The third, male, she said, "Azure dragon on green tunic." And the last, female, she said, "Phoenix on yellow tunic." The squads changed as she spoke, and when she stepped back it was to a riot of color.

"Impressive," Muriel said. And as she spoke a young looking female Envoy came up.

"Madam Chun, I am the doctor that has been assigned to you," and she bowed.

"Formalities we will save for when needed, as when we entertain some pompous jackass," Chun said, smiling. "May I suggest for you that we use a different tunic, and in a pale blue. Something like a wrap, so that the buttons wouldn't interfere with working with babies and children?"

"Ah, like this, perhaps," and she changed.

"Excellent, and perhaps the character for medicine on the collars," and the character was embroidered in. "This looks very nice, and does you credit."

"Thank you, Chun. We haven't had much time to study China and the symbology of colors and creatures, but we will so that we can understand your thinking."

"You are all greatly appreciated for being willing to come with me, and very understanding in setting up the way you have in gender, clothing, colors and animals," Chun said. "And I WILL explain why I suggested these as we get to know one another. As we go on, and you learn more, feel free to embellish by making the tunics brocade or embroidering the existing tunics. In other words, you may look at these as temporary and hurried. Nor do all the tunics need to be identical in a squad, as long as the basic theme is continued. I have my reasons for them, and you will understand in time. For now, please bear with me. This is as new to me as it is to you."

"Chun, may I suggest that you change your dragon?" asked her doctor.

"To what?"

"There should be clouds under its feet."

"That would imply flying," Chun said.

"Of course. Didn't you know? Didn't Huang Fu tell you?"

"He might not have known," Muriel said, "or might not have had time. Watch." And she rose up in the air, above their heads, walked across the street, then shot away at one hundred fifty miles per hour, returned doing some acrobatics, then walked down to them again. "It's actually a function of your anchor and personal shield. Usually, if we have to use more speed, we just translate." Muriel sent the instructions as a short, mental burst to Chun and her squads and doctor. The effort brought grins from the troops, and a speculative look from Chun.

Chun moved away from Muriel, then ascended, and took off. She came back, walking majestically, very erect and grinning like a cat. "This," she said, "this caps it all, and now I know how to make an appearance. Yes, doctor, I will change the dragon. We ARE celestial beings!" And the dragon, still in its prowling pose, walked on clouds.

"May I see your child now, Chun?" asked the doctor.

"Of course you may. Just through that door and to the left. An Envoy named Betty is guarding her. As another Envoy, she shouldn't have any problem showing her to you," Chun said, and watched as the doctor walked away. And . . . the whoosh doors claimed another victim. The doctor stopped as they whooshed open, then tentatively moved forward, then quickly transited the path they would take on closing.

Chun turned back to Muriel, her eyes sparkling and attempting to control a grin. "Now, tell me, young lady – would YOU have warned her?"

"Of course not," said Muriel, matching the eyes but not hiding the grin. "It's harmless fun, since the doors won't close if anyone or anything is in the sensor range. And they close slowly. But it does show that you're as wicked as I am, Li Chun." And they both laughed.

"I can see where that would put pompous men off their stride, and gain you the upper hand right off the bat," Chun said.

"And more than just pompous men," Muriel said. "The movement was something I saw on a television program, years ago. The idea of glass was my squads doing. They felt that we should be able to see who was coming. And it's come in handy for that. Originally, when this office was designed, I had just been trained, and didn't realize that we could just translate outside and form up, or even translate from where ever we were in here, and come out in formation. The doors were meant to get out of our way in a hurry, so we could defend the building or do whatever at need."

"I can see where they would do that. And I think I shall incorporate something like that when I build my office."

"I can see you thinking. May I ask what?" asked Muriel.

"We will make an entrance to Beijing. And I do mean entrance, walking on air above the city, and descending only to get to the government building. We will translate in to the council room, in air of course, and confront the idiots that have ruled us with threat of force for so long, and deal with them as seems fit at the time. When the building is empty, it will be leveled, and my office will be built on the site. I may have to ask for help with that."

"And you shall have it," Muriel replied. "Your brother can request Envoys from Home to help. And they'll be glad to. May I suggest some special effects to attract attention? Fireworks, gongs, a bell something to get the people to see that a new order is coming in?"

"You may certainly suggest it. And you did. I will need to set up a structure quickly. Not really a government. I've seen what you did with this Enclave, and talked with the Envoys at Guest House," Chun said.

"We, too, if you don't mind my interrupting," said one of the squad leaders. "We've talked with Muriel's squads, and with Ted's, before we formed up out here. We understand that Muriel has friends here with their own squads." One could almost hear the 'hint, hint' at

the end of it.

“I don't see why you shouldn't be able to talk to my friends or their squads,” Muriel said. “Depending on what your new boss decides, of course.”

“Go, rascal. See if any of them will talk to you. Gather as much information as you can that we can steal and use in China,” Chun said, laughing. “And I expect full reports from you all. You'll be tested in the morning.” And the squads scattered like startled pigeons, laughing as they went.

# Chapter 7

## The Conquest of Beijing (Thursday afternoon)

A mass of clouds appeared just west of Beijing. Lightning flashed and thunder rolled. And between the thunderclaps, was the sound of a gong. The clouds grew, and a figure could be seen to step out of the roiling mass. Shortly, it was followed by two more, one holding a baby. Then twenty more, formed up in squads of five. And the figures walked on air.

To say that the procession drew a crowd would be an understatement. Li Chun's entrance into the city was heralded by the media, and people were directed to go to the Council chambers building. And they did, gaping at the stately procession of this small woman and her troop.

As Chun reached the building that had housed the government, and now contained them, the clouds and lightning disappeared, and only the gong was heard. She stood, fifteen feet in the air backed up by her troops, brother, and doctor with her daughter, and waited until the area was filled to capacity and more. Then the gong sound stopped.

"I am Li Chun, and I am the Ambassador from Home to the People of China," she said in a quiet voice amplified to cover the area. "I am here to help you. I am here to train those that can be trained and request it. I am . . . ." A shot rang out, and suddenly a struggling figure, still holding a gun, was in the air. The gun was removed from his hand, and he was encased in a shield that stopped his struggles. "I am here to stop that sort of nonsense," she continued. A mental touch from her brother and she said, "I know you, first deputy of the eastern district and leader of the communist party for the district. I know you for a man that has perverted the people of China. You have a choice. You can learn that your ways are gone, and adjust to the way things are now, or you can die. Choose."

"Never!" he shouted. "The path of Chairman Mao is the only way."

"Not any more," said Chun. "That path has led to the enslavement of the people of China and only enriched those of the upper levels of the communist party. That path ended with the loss of your military might that kept the population in check. It is gone. Learn or die, old man. I don't care which. Either will serve as an example to the people you once put down."

"Then kill me, bitch. I will not be ruled by such as you!" A brief beam of fire struck the man in the chest, dissolving his body to the subatomic level in less than the blink of an eye.

"In a little while I will go into this building and speak to those that are there. They will be offered a choice. The same choice this man was offered. Those that accept my offer of a new way of life will live, under probation. Those that won't, because of their greed or lust for



power, will be killed. When the building is vacated, one way or another, it will be destroyed and my office will take its place. You will no longer be faced with this symbol of the tyranny of the many by the few. Instead, a building open to all who wish to see me. There is only one rule to follow – keep the peace. Violence by you or against you will not be tolerated. This country has seen too much bloodshed for a worthless cause. It is time we protected each other. If you cannot live with what I am doing, and offer no violence, you will have the opportunity to leave and go elsewhere. Now, excuse me. I have a job to do, to finish cleaning up the mess the communists created. I'll be back, shortly.”

Chun and her entourage blinked out, and appeared over the heads of the Council, who were arguing, loudly, about how they could retake the country. **ENOUGH!** Her voice boomed out over the noise of the mass of angry men. **YOU GENTLEMEN MADE A SERIOUS MISTAKE. YOU ATTEMPTED AN ASSAULT ON HOME IN THE PERSON OF THE LEADER OF HOME. YOU HAVE PAID FOR THAT MISTAKE. YOUR TOYS – YOUR MILITARY MIGHT HAS BECOME NOTHING, DESTROYED BY THOSE YOU SOUGHT TO DESTROY. AND NOW, YOU FACE ME. I AM LI CHUN, AMBASSADOR FROM HOME TO THE PEOPLE OF CHINA, AND I GIVE YOU A CHOICE. LEARN A NEW WAY OR DIE. CHOOSE.**

Several epithets rang out, followed swiftly by energy beams that destroyed the bodies of those shouting them, down to the subatomic level. And a distinct odor of incontinence permeated the air. **I WILL OFFER YOU AN ALTERNATIVE. YOU CAN GO AND FACE THE PEOPLE YOU HAVE SO ENSLAVED FOR SO LONG. I WONDER HOW LONG YOU WOULD SURVIVE IT. I OFFER A CLEANER DEATH. THOSE THAT DO NOT CHOOSE WILL HAVE CHOSEN DEATH. I WILL NOT WAIT MUCH LONGER. THIS BUILDING AND ALL THAT IS IN IT WILL BE DESTROYED, SHORTLY. YOU WILL NOT SEE THAT DESTRUCTION. I WOULD NOT BE THAT CRUEL.**

“You can not do this,” another shouted. “You have no authority to do this! WE are the government, and you must obey.”

**YOU CEASED TO BE A GOVERNMENT WHEN YOU ATTEMPTED TO KILL INNOCENT WOMEN AND CHILDREN IN THE AMERICAN ENCLAVE. YOU BECAME OUTLAWS WHEN YOU ATTEMPTED TO DO VIOLENCE TO THOSE WHO HAD OFFERED NO VIOLENCE TO YOU. YOU HAVE DEMONSTRATED THAT YOU ARE NOT FIT TO LIVE IN A CIVILIZED SOCIETY. AS HUMANS YOU ARE LOWER THAN DOGS. LOWER THAN EARTHWORMS. LOWER EVEN THAN COCKROACHES. THE PEOPLE ARE TAKING BACK THE COUNTRY, AND THERE IS NO PLACE IN IT FOR TYRANNY. CHOOSE OR DIE.**

All that met her statement was generalized anger and denial. She let it go on for a minute, then a wide beam of energy swept from the back of the chamber to the front, destroying even the chairs where the council had sat. Then she and her squads translated back outside and high above the building. Again a beam shot out and swept from the back of the building to the front, obliterating everything there, right down to the sub-basement. When the beam winked out, the area was flooded with Envoys, filling the hole and setting up the building. Chun lowered herself to a height where the crowd could see her easily.

**"It is over,"** her amplified voice reached the crowd. **"Those that would be our masters now face a judgment harsher than any we could give them. Even harsher than the judgments they gave out. Envoys – the People of Home – will be coming to offer you the training, if you can take it and want it. The majority of the population of this country are ordinary people trying to support their families and protect them. Those that aren't, that are greedy for money or power, will not be able to take the training. This isn't a judgment of ours, it's because they won't be able to make a mental link with their trainer. Any that can not take the training will be offered the opportunity to leave. China is now a territorial possession of Home, and the whole country will be an Enclave. Some minimal administration will be done, to ensure that services such as utilities, hospitals, food supply, power, and sewage are taken care of. Be patient. Go to your homes and businesses. They will come to help."**

Chun grounded herself, and turned to look at the building in progress. "What am I forgetting, brother?"

"Nothing I can think of, right off hand. We do have Embassies in the city."

"Oh, now that's a lark," Chun replied. "Embassies in an Embassy. Leave them for now. If they offer no violence to us, we will leave them alone until we're set up. What about the building?"

"I gave the specs to the leader of these Envoys as they came in," her brother said, "They were rough and I apologized. She just laughed and said that she had enough information, and would do us up proud. And it looks like she meant it. I see traditional style and modern construction. Lots of glass in front. Wide, covered porch, easy access even for wheelchairs. Yet the feel of the building is ancient. Somebody did their homework on Chinese architecture, ancient and modern."

"They're white. And bright," a young voice said from beside her. Chun looked down at a young boy. "You're not as bright, and you're gray. He's gray, but brighter. Are you an Envoy?"

"No, I'm human. This man was human, and died. Those are Envoys, working on the building. How old are you, boy?" Chun asked in a pleasant and quiet voice.

"I'm ten."

"Are your parents here?" she asked.

"Yes, they're over there."

"Would you ask them to come here, please? I'd like to talk to them for a minute. Nobody's in trouble. Just talk," she said. The boy scampered off and was back shortly with his parents.

“Mistress,” the father said, bowing low.

“Just Chun. I am not special. You have a very intelligent son. He asks good questions. You must be proud of him, respected one,” she said.

“He is a good boy, but sometimes headstrong, and not always respectful. Always he wants to know things,” the man said.

“That is not necessarily a fault,” Chun said. “And all boys are headstrong at times, and sometimes forget their respect. No, in all, I am impressed with this young boy of yours. He sees things that most others don't, and asks good questions about them. It is possible that he gets that talent from you two. In his case, I think he could take at least some of the Envoy training. It would help him and it would help you. It would help him by making it easier for him to learn new things – get a real education. It would help you by the things he'd be able to do with the Envoy training. I would like to see if he can make a mental link to me. May I?”

“Mistress . . . please! He's a good boy. Please don't take him from us.”

“No one is taking him from you,” Chun said. “He is your son, and a good boy. This little test can be done right here, with you around him, and will not hurt him with the possible exception of a headache that can be quickly soothed away. And, if he can make the link, you can even watch the training. It is not really long or difficult, and won't hurt him. And he would still be your son and go home with you.”

::Hello?: Chun's eyes went wide at receiving the mental send.

::Hello, youngling. You should stop trying now, or you will get a bad headache,:: she sent back.

“Oh, my. Young man, let me help sooth your head. You push hard. There, is that better? More?”

“It still hurts some,” he said.

“Let me, please, Chun. I am more sensitive to it,” Chun's doctor said, and placed a hand on the boy's shoulder. Shortly, the boy was back to smiling, and the hand was removed.

“Now, young man, no more mental connection until you've got the energy to do it right.” Chun said.

“Yes, ma'am. Sorry.”

“Nothing to be sorry about, young man. You did very well, and without any instruction. But you don't yet have the power to hold it for long,” Chun said. “You are a brave boy.”

“Thank you, Chun . . . .”

"Son! You do not address the mistress like that. Show respect!"

"But father, she said to call her that. It would be worse to not call her what she chooses to be called."

"It does not matter, son. You do not address the rich and powerful by their given name. It shows disrespect."

"Sir, we are not rich or powerful, in the way that you think it. What we have is knowledge and ability. Knowledge and ability that your son could have, in time," Chun said, quietly and with a smile.

"But mistress, we are poor. We cannot afford such training, much as I would like to."

"I did not ask for payment. This is knowledge that was meant for humans to have. The Envoys give it freely, no cost, no obligation, because they care about us. And we that have taken it give it just as freely. Soon, all of China will have people like me. Your son could be one of them. You, too, if you can make a mental link. It costs you nothing but a little time and maybe a little pain from a headache at first until your training gets beyond that point. And even that, as you saw, we can help," Chun said.

"Your son is a Child of Home. He has, within him, that which makes Envoys what they are. And he has what you have given him," Chun added. "He can help this country be at peace with the world. Can help make it great again. But great in peace."

"Ah! Chun! There you are. I wanted to ask you some questions. Oh, I'm Carla, a friend of Muriel's. Come, sit with me. Bring your friends. I can always make more chairs, and we might as well be comfortable."

"You? You're the reason the Envoys had no trouble building this office?" asked Chun.

"Yea, well, I had some ideas, and they knew what you wanted for rooms and such. And it all just seemed to fit together. Funny how it works that way, sometimes. Everybody together and stuff." By now, Carla had an assembly of chairs, closer to the building and out of the main stream of traffic, and guided the family over to them. As Chun took a chair, the young boy grabbed the one next to her, and grinned at her in his impudence. And Chun grinned back.

"These chairs," the boy's father said. "They weren't here, then they were. How?"

"Oh, part of the Envoy training. They're actually made out of shields. I just tell the shields how I want them to look and feel, and they do it. And no, I'm not making it from nothing. Shields are made from power. Matter and energy are really just two aspects of the same thing," Carla said. "Well, it turns out that there are steps in between raw power and matter. And that's what we use."

"And you say my son would be able to do things like this?"

"Oh, yes, in time. It takes some practice, but the training teaches the basics of it, and we've all contributed little things since then that anybody can do. Hmm. Looking at you and your wife," Carla said, "I'd say that you could do the same. Would you like to try?"

"But, it's all so . . . it isn't the traditional way to do things!" the father exclaimed.

"No, it isn't," Carla said. "But we've learned over the four years since Muriel taught us, that 'tradition' can be a good guide for how to do things, but it can also be used as an excuse for not ever changing. If a child remains an infant all its life, it may be pretty but it's useless. Everything in life changes at its own pace. Learning is the same, it changes as new things are discovered, new ways of doing things are found. Tradition is not a hard and fast thing with absolute penalties for not following it. It's a guide for showing how some things are done. But only a guide. If it works, use it. But, if something better comes along and can be shown to work, then it's time to put away that particular tradition. Saying that one particular way is traditional is simply a way of saying that you know that way works, but there may be other ways, too."

"You have been taught," Chun said softly, "that there is only one way of doing particular things. You have not been allowed to think of other ways because they weren't traditional. That's using tradition as handcuffs. But everything that's traditional now was new at one time. It became a tradition by being tested under various circumstances to show that it always worked. What do you do for a living?"

"I make cabinets."

"Ah! Good. Are all your cabinets exactly the same? Always the same shape, always the same size, always the same wood, never any changes between them?"

"No, of course not. They wouldn't always fit where they needed to go if they were like that!"

"But, if it was traditional to only make them one way, and you were forced to make them only one way, that would be the traditional way. And sometimes they wouldn't fit. And sometimes they wouldn't be what your customer wanted, and sometimes they wouldn't look right," Chun said.

"Sir," Carla took up the thread, "When Muriel, the Leader of Home, was being taught the Envoy techniques, it was traditional for shields to be six flat panels, like a box. And they worked. But they could be hit in such a way that the person they were protecting could be hurt. They could be collapsed. And Muriel saw a better way, to make them one piece, like a capsule, a round tube with rounded ends. And her shield was tested by her security squad by shooting her. The bullets never touched her. Had she made her personal shield in the traditional way the force of the bullets would at least have knocked her down. She never even felt them hit the shield. Her father still has the bullets. She picked them out of the shield and gave them to him."

"When the Envoys found out what she had done," Carla added, "they didn't holler 'but it's not traditional!' Instead, they ALL adopted the new style, and now that's the traditional way of making personal shields. And, she's proved them under more difficult conditions. She's been shot at many times, including by tanks. She's even had a type of bomb that's actually many little bombs on a chain wrapped around her. When the bomblets went off they didn't even muss her hair. She was able to walk away from that spot completely unharmed."

"This training . . . it would protect him?"

"The first three things that are taught in Envoy training," Carla said, "are how to make a mental link – because the training is done and monitored through that link, to find your power to work with, and to make shields. There are two other steps, but I don't suggest teaching your son those just yet. When he gets a little older and has the maturity to understand the dangers of them, then we'd teach him. But those first three steps can save his life. Oh, and the only step that can be failed is the first. After that, we find ways to help a person understand how to do them. But making a mental link requires an already existing ability. And either you have it or you do not."

"And he can make that link?"

"He already did," Chun said. "To me, and without my coaching him to do it. You have a remarkable son. A very good boy."

"Then, if he can do it, I'd like him to have the training," his father said. His mother just nodded, slightly.

# Chapter 8

## One Generation Teaches Another

(Wednesday afternoon, later)

Chun looked at the boy and asked, "May I know what you are called? It's easier than saying 'hey you' all the time."

The boy giggled and said, "I am Yang An"

"Yes. Poplar peace," replied Chun with a smile. "Well, An, I'd like you to stand in front of me, please. Good. Move your feet apart a bit. Yes, that's good. Now look down and imagine that there's a tunnel between your toes. If you need to, close your eyes. There, see the tunnel? At the end of it is a bright light. Reach for it with your mind, call to it. It's your light, your power, and once you have it it will never go away again. YES! Excellent. You got it, first try. Now, no more headaches from trying to make a mental link."

::Like this?:: asked An.

::Exactly right, An. And now you can link to anybody that can make a link. I think you have some friends that you've been trying this with, haven't you?:: asked Chun.

::Um, well . . . ::

::Uh, huh. I thought so. No, you didn't do anything wrong. Unwise, perhaps, because none of you had the strength. But I think you know that, now. So, now we teach you how to make a shield. I'll show you how it's done, in your head, and we'll work on getting you to do it, yourself. Now watch:: And Chun showed him how to visualize it, how to connect his power to it, and how to set it to pass only what he wanted it to pass. An watched closely, and tried to do the steps just as Chun had done.

::OK, that was a good first attempt. Slowly, now. We can speed it up as you get more comfortable with it, so don't be upset if it takes time at first. Like this . . . :: And she broke the process down into individual steps, and went over them with him a couple of times. His next try, he got it. ::That's good, An. Very good. Now, make it go away and do it again:: Two more times and An had the process up to speed, and the shield was steady and strong.

Huang Fu handed the boy's father a stick, and motioned for him to hit his son. Silently, he encouraged the man until he did. The stick stopped a foot away from the boy, and An never noticed it. Chun had to point it out to him.

"Now, An, it's time for you to have a new set of clothes. Only they're not something that I'll give you. They're something that you'll make for yourself. I'm going to ask one of the men in my security squad to teach you that, because I don't think you'd like to undress in front of me." An giggled. "Your father can go with you to see that you are well treated. Mister

Yang, my security squad are all Envoys. Envoys have no gender because they have no bodies. What you see is simply a shield made to look and move like a human body. Because of that, he can mimic An, and show him different styles of clothing, create the images for An to use to create his own clothes. Carla has graciously created a dressing room, there, that is large enough for you to be with them and watch the process.”

As the leader of the 'tigers' stepped out, An took his father's hand and urged him to come with him. It was a half hour before they returned. But when they returned both An and his father had new clothes, including shoes, and there was a dazed, proud look on Mister Yang's face, and there were tears forming in his eyes. 'Tiger' leader went back to his squad with a large grin on his face. Chun looked questioningly at him.

“An taught him. That's what took so long. I watched and monitored, and showed An how to do some of the things, but he taught his father,” the Envoy said. “They have three sets of clothes, now, and know how to make more.”

“Well done! And well done to you, An, for teaching your father how to do it. Mister Yang, you truly have a remarkable son. You should be proud of him,” Chun said.

“Well,” Carla said. “I can see where I need to show that even foreign girls can be useful. I'll just ask one of my squad to help me, and we'll see that Missus Yang is brought up to this point. That is, if she's willing to learn.” An's mother looked to his father, and he nodded, quietly.

“Chun,” Carla said, “Why don't you and your squads go look at the building and see what you think. One of my squad will be happy to show you around the various rooms, so you can know what goes where, and you can make suggestions for changes. Take An and his father, if they want to go. One of my girls and I will get An's mother up to their level, then we can talk about the rest of the training for them, and you can put stripes on all of them.”

“I would like to see what you have done, Carla. Come An, bring your father and let the women do their thing,” Chun smiled at them.

“WHAT IS GOING ON HERE!” a male voice rang out. “SHOW ME YOUR PAPERS, IMMEDIATELY!”

::Squads, surround them, and protect Missus Yang,:: Chun sent, then walked up to the loudmouth, and pulled out her passport. “I am in charge here. I am Chun, Ambassador from Home to the people of China. Due to the stupidity of the leaders of the People's Republic of China in attempting to kill the Leader of Home, China is now the property of Home. The previous government no longer exists, nor do its petty laws. And I have given no one the authority to talk to anyone that way.”

“I AM MUNICIPAL POLICE . . . .”

“No,” Chun said, silencing him with a shield gag. “You are nothing. I am the only authority here, and I have not authorized you to act as police. Under the rules of Home you



are breaking the peace. You are under arrest. If that is a firearm you are carrying, put it on the ground, now. Firearms are forbidden in the Enclave of China. Do as you are told, peasant, or it will be destroyed where it is, and may take you with it.” The man drew his gun from his holster, but instead of placing it on the ground he fired at Chun. Her eyes flashed black, and the man and gun dissolved into subatomic particles.

Chun then addressed the other ex-police officers. “I am the dragon that walks on air. I am the power of the universe. I am the protector of the East. I am the only authority that the Enclave of China has. Your officer has died for his stupidity,” she continued, picking the bullet out of her shield and showing it to the men and the crowd that had gathered. “His bones will not be returned to his family. He will not join his ancestors, for even his soul has died. You now have a choice. You can live in this Enclave only as long as you are willing to live by the rules of Home. Or you can leave with only that which you have on. Or you will be removed as your government and your officer were removed. Put your weapons on the ground in front of me, now, then choose what your future will be.”

Three stepped forward immediately and placed their weapons and badges on the ground at her feet. The others hesitated, then finally did likewise. When they had all stepped back, Chun looked down and the weapons disappeared. “Now,” she said, looking at each of them with eyes that were still glowing black, “choose.”

One by one, the men approached and said that they would live in the Enclave, if she would let them. Huang Fu called Envoys from Home to escort the men home, and see if they and their families could be trained. And if not, attempt to determine what honest work they might qualify for. As the Envoys and men moved off, Chun turned around.

“Whoa, girl,” Carla said. “We’re on your side!”

Chun closed her eyes and took a deep breath. “I’m sorry. No, I’m not angry with you. And I’d better learn to control it better.” She opened her eyes and looked up. “Better now?”

“Oh, yea. Chun, I’ve only ever heard of the black glowing eyes. Never seen it. But if you aimed that at that first dude and he STILL kept mouthing off, then you were right. NOTHING could have saved him. But now you know. Your shield will stop anything. Look at the bullet,” Carla said.

Chun looked down in her hand at the bullet. It was a nine millimeter “dirty slug” - in other words unjacketed – the cheapest ammunition there was for the gun. The raw lead showed no deformity from hitting the shield, and the marks of the pistol’s rifling showed plainly on it’s surface.

“If you ever had any doubts, Chun,” Carla said, “you can put them to rest. Your shield stopped that slug, without squashing it, from about three feet away. And held it there until you picked it out of your shield. I’ve seen Muriel go outrageous on people. And that’s scary. But the calm way you spoke to that dude, I’m really glad you’ve never spoken to me like that.”

“Carla, what is ‘dude’?” Chun asked.

"Oh, a person that thinks more of appearances than reality. It used to mean someone that was all dressed up, fancy, for a vacation on an American western ranch. It's come to also be a derogatory term for people who just don't think, particularly men," Carla said.

"OH! I get it. Yes, he was definitely a 'dude'," she said, and snickered. "I thought I came on, how do you say? To strong?"

"Yea, that's the term, but you didn't," Carla grinned at her. "Sometime, ask for records of some of the things that Muriel did when she first went to Enclave. Some of the people she dealt with. You'll find out just how outrageous she can be. By the way, I didn't mention it before, but I like your clothes, and those of your squads. VERY distinctive, and very in line with your heritage. I can see some ways to make them look richer, too, without being overblown. Things like patterning the cloth, in the same color. There are people in America that would love to have clothing like that. Keep it in mind, as you get things set up. And call me for any help in that line. I'm already doing it with clothing manufacturers in America. They don't have something like this and it would give your country some income."

"You'd help us?"

"Of course. Why not? You're an Ambassador of Home, and we all stick together and help each other. Oh, you know how to make a record, don't you?"

"Yes," said Chun. "Muriel showed me."

"Good. Send a copy back to her of what just went down. I'll send one from my point of view, too," Carla said, and a DVD appeared in her hand. "Remember to make two. You'll want one for yourself."

"Sister," said Huang Fu, "I have some already, and from the points of view of your squads, too, if you like." Chun thought for a moment, then two DVDs appeared in her hand, and she handed one to Carla, who also collected one from Huang Fu.

::Muriel,:: Carla sent on a broad send, so all could hear, ::you picked a winner. Take a look at these. Chun has definitely taken over,:: and she sent off the copies of the record.

"Now!" Chun said, "I want to see my new office. Come." And she headed for the front, fully aware that the Envoys, enjoying a good joke themselves, had probably installed whoosh doors. And she smiled at the thought. If they hadn't, they would.

"Huang Fu, a moment," Carla said. "Your sister . . . ."

"China is a hard land," he said. "It always has been. It will take a hard person to tame it to peace and friendship. I think she is that person. Oh, she'll temper in time . . . become gentler. But now, what it needs is a firm hand. She has it and knows how to use it. She will do well. Now, I must go, or she'll miss me."

“Go. And thank you,” Carla replied. “Now, Missus Yang, here's what we're going to do,” she went on. And the training began.

Chun loved what she saw. The furniture looked Chinese, but was comfortable. Her desk was elegant and simple. Her chair, almost throne-like with its high back, swiveled and rocked and was the most comfortable chair she'd ever experienced, which was good if she was to spend most of her time in it. Padded straight chairs, four of them, ranged in front of the desk, and a carved railing separated it from a large casual area that contained chairs around the wall and rail. And in the center was a low table and mats, such as were used by those that couldn't afford expensive furniture, but of better quality. Chun laughed. She could just see self-important people being expected to meet with her, sitting on the floor. One of the chairs in the room, closest to her desk, was again throne-like, but was a recliner of extraordinary ability, including a vibrating massage and the ability to become a bed for naps.

The walls of the office, including the one behind her desk and chair, were made of wood and plaster, but not in vertical sections, but in eye pleasing irregular shapes that hinted at mountains and valleys, even rivers and lakes. It was much like an expensive brush drawing. It would take many years to examine all of it. That theme was continued behind the break room seating, and gave the entire room a softer, gentler look than Muriel's office. The one exception was above Chun's desk and chair, high enough to be seen. There, seeming to be floating out of the scene and moving to enter the room, was the Blue Dragon Walking On Air that was on the front of her tunic.

The break room was similar furniture in style, and her squads seemed pleased, trying out the seats that reclined and swiveled. They did have a large screen television. The kitchen was suited to Chinese food, and one of her squad members assured her that even American food could be created for visitors. Kuaizi, what the Western world calls chopsticks, were available of course. But so was Western flatware of what appeared to be pure silver. There was even a tea service.

An addition off the office was a large conference room accessible through a doorway behind the on-duty squad desks. Table and chairs that would have made an Emperor jealous. Large, flat screen television for presentations behind her head. Right now, the screen showed scenes from various areas of the country. And a smaller television embedded in the table at her place to duplicate what was on the large screen. The room could double as a dining area for State dinners.

She walked back into the main office and noticed that the desks for the on-duty squad had changed. On the sides and front was now the carved symbol of the squad that had taken the first duty. The Envoy escorting her informed her that they would change whenever the squads changed. Each desk held a computer, and the text on the screens was Chinese characters. Like Muriel's office, there was sufficient room for the squad members to just push back and scramble between the desks to get out. Unlike Muriel's, where the desks faced the front window, here the desks faced Chun's office, and the squad leader was the closest to the door.

And, between her formal office and the on-duty squad was Huang Fu's desk. It

contained computer monitor and telephone, and In and Out baskets for paperwork. Like Chun's desk chair, his could swivel and rock and, though not quite as elegant as his sister's, still commanded respect. The front of the desk, which was plain cherry and highly polished, had the Crane from the front of his tunic inlaid in a white wood. This would be the first thing that visitors would see, coming into the office, and it marked him as someone important. And, indeed, the room seemed to radiate out from around him.

Her apartment was a wonder. Not as large as Muriel's, and Chun thought no offense at the girl for hers. Muriel had her reasons for it to be that large. No, Chun's was more delicate in size and style, though it did include an ample sitting area and television that was suitably disguised. There was also a nursery for her daughter that included changing and bathing areas that was separate from the apartment proper. The bathroom, like the ones downstairs for visitors, made use of Western style plumbing. Downstairs it was utilitarian. But up here . . . oh, my! Up here she had a tub that doubled as a hot tub if she wished. There was also a shower that looked like it needed a college education to operate. Scented soaps filled one shelf, while others held towels and washcloths that were the softest that she had ever seen. And the kitchen. She couldn't believe the variety of appliances available.

"You probably won't ever be allowed to touch them," her brother said. "There are four squad members, one from each squad, that have taken it upon themselves to prepare your meals and any snacks you might want. You may not realize it, but they are proud of their Dragon. What you have done, today, though distasteful, was necessary. And in every case you showed that, although the choices were limited, that you weren't without mercy and compassion."

"How do you know what I think, Huang Fu?"

"Simple. I watched you. I watched you grow, and saw your likes and dislikes. I rejoiced in your marriage, and mourned at your loss, and met him as he came Home and helped him regain his balance. And I cheated. I set myself up to be in the most likely place that you would go, should you decide to run, so that I could try to send you back gently," he said.

"You did more than that."

"Yes, and I expected to be in trouble for that. Especially when we were sent to Muriel. And she surprised me. Instead of being in trouble, she was overjoyed to find that I had trained you. Like her, you were a first for China and you were intelligent. Lack of knowledge could be cured. Lack of intelligence, lack of the ability to really think and act, can't be cured. And she could see that you were intelligent and determined, and capable of doing whatever was necessary to protect your daughter," he said.

"Well! . . . Well. I guess I'll have to try, then. And I think that maybe we should get back downstairs. I think Carla is bringing Missus Yang. So, we will see what the latest trainee feels about the training." They returned to her office just in time to see Missus Yang get spooked by the whoosh doors, then enter. And what she wore told the whole story. A very traditional style dress, a Hanfu in layered shades of blue, patterned with butterflies. Her

hair had been put up in an elegant fashion, almost changing the way she looked, and she and Carla were giggling between each other. Her husband and son, that had stayed downstairs in the break room with the squads, were stunned.

"I always wondered what it would be like to wear something like this," Missus Yang said. And her words broke the spell. Ah ran to her and hugged her. Her husband moved more slowly. "I haven't seen that look on your face since we were first introduced," she said to him. "This isn't for every day. But I thought, since I was learning to dress myself, that I would like something special."

"Now, I'll have to find something as elegant to set you off. And a job that pays a lot more, so we will have the money to take you places," her husband said.

"Oh, that's easy," said Carla. "Anything from a Western style business suit to very traditional Chinese men's wear. I'll be around long enough to show you images. Some of my squad would even model them for you."

"Carla, what you have done here is amazing!" Chun said. "These walls, so like a brush painting."

"I'm glad you like it. One of my squad designed it. Aerial landscape photographs of your country would have been too busy, he thought, so he used those landscapes by converting them to brush style drawings and blended them into a whole," Carla said.

"Then thank him for me. The effect is beautiful. And I feel I should know some of these places," Chun replied. "Where is your squad?"

"Oh, when they found out that you were training this family, they went to their home to 'upgrade' it a bit."

"Hmm. Then I suppose I should 'upgrade' his job a bit, too. Well, that's for tomorrow, I think, after they finish their training," Chun said.

# Chapter 9

## Ripples

(Friday morning)

::Muriel, the President of Russia is on the line and wants to talk to you.::

::Thanks, Mata, would you transfer him, please?::

“Sergei, zdravstvujtye, How are you, today?”

“I was wondering if you'd have time to come over and talk to me, today,” he said.

“That's possible. Or, you could come here.”

“No, I think it would be best if you came here. There are some people that would like to meet you, and find out what your intentions are.”

“Uh, huh. Sergei, don't you think it would be better if you told me what this was all about? After all, a girl has to dress appropriately for the occasion.”

“Oh, nothing like that. You can come as you are.”

“Sergei, I just got up. Are you suggesting something indecent?”

“Oh! NO! Nothing like that. No, just your normal uniform would be fine.”

“Uh, huh. You know, Sergei, that for something like this I should probably bring some security.”

“Oh, I'm sure that wouldn't be necessary, Muriel.”

“Uh, huh. Come to think of it, perhaps I should bring all four squads and Mata. Sergei, you are doing a lot of dancing around, trying very hard to not tell me anything. That means one of two things to me. Either your military wants to try to force me to give them the training so they can bust their way into China, now, or they want to hold me to try to force Li Chun to open China up to them. Either way, it means trying to take and hold me. Now, maybe you'd better go back to them and tell them that it won't work,” Muriel said. “First, because it would make me very angry with you if you tried to get me to come there under false pretenses. And second, because I'd destroy them, then the military and any industry that supports it. Call me back when you are willing to talk.” And Muriel hung up.

“So, how long do you think it will take?” asked Mata.

“Maybe five minutes, if I hit the mark. Maybe never, if he finds out he was being

duped. I'd bet on the first."

"OK, I'll alert the squads, and you should really get dressed. Paisley pajamas just don't give the right impression."

"I LIKE paisley pajamas," Muriel said. Mata just grinned. "OK, OK, I'll change. Better?" she asked when she switched to Class 'A' uniform.

"You know, you never did add the thin, red line that Carla suggested. You have it's equivalent on your dress uniform."

"I haven't found a way to do it that I like, yet."

"You've said that for four years."

"Yep," said Muriel. "Basically, because there isn't any way to do it that looks good. And if people need that to show them that I've been 'blooded' then they lack the intelligence to have reviewed my record. In which case, they probably have no idea of what I'm capable. And that works in my favor."

"And that ring sounds like it might be the President."

"It is. Mata, I'm going to try to put up the visual for you. It'll be brief, though, so be prepared." Muriel created an image of the President's office. Two men held him, one with a gun to his head. "Well, Sergei, which was it?"

"Both, Muriel."

"OK, I'll be right there. Tell your friends to be ready for me." As she cut the connection, she threw a shield around Sergei that was skin tight, then rang a bell as she and her squads translated.

She came in through the door, and two burly troops grabbed her arms – she'd pulled in her shields. Mata and the squads came in behind the President. And since the military was focused on the door, they didn't notice the squads.

"All right, young lady. Now, we're going to do things MY way," a general said.

The men holding the President immediately lost their heads – literally. A noose found it's way around the general's neck. The two men holding her were flung across the room with enough force to knock them out by her explosively pushing her shields out.

"No, general, we'll do them MY way. Some people never learn, do they?" she made it a declaration, and tightened the noose a bit. She walked over to him, and grew so that their eyes were on the same level. "Your bully boys couldn't hold me. They couldn't hold the President, either, and their deaths are on you. Now, would you like to hang slowly, right here and now? Or would you rather face a Russian court and explain why you were threatening

the life of the President. I understand that Russian courts take a rather dim view of such behavior, but I could be wrong.” When the general made some abortive attempts at speech, she loosened the noose a bit.

“You won’t get away with this!”

“Actually, I not only WILL get away with it, I have. And you won’t,” Muriel said. “So, tell me, why do you think you have the right to invade a foreign country that doesn’t even have any military? And while you’re at it, why do you think I’m so stupid that I’d walk into your little trap and not be able to defend myself? Just how stupid are you? Come to think of it, answer the last one first. That will pretty much answer the other two questions.”

“You bitch. How DARE you question a member of the supreme military!”

“You forget, jerk. I’m the one holding the noose. And I outrank you, you little twerp. Or haven’t you heard all the titles they loaded me with? One of them is Marshal of the Forces of Home. Another is THE Leader of Home. And the last people around whose necks I put a noose, shortly after sent missiles to kill me. And I’m allergic to being killed. It makes me break out in all sorts of outrageous behavior, like sending someone to destroy the military. And sending someone else to kill the government. That it was her idea doesn’t matter. I accept their deaths as being my doing. Oh, and for your information, the country you were intending to invade is now the property of Home, which means that you’d still be declaring war on Home. And that’s a war that you can’t win. Sergei, your country has laws about treason, doesn’t it?”

“Indeed it does,” he rumbled. “Give me a minute and I’ll see if we can get him arraigned immediately. We might even see him convicted today.” He picked up a phone and made a call. A few minutes of discussion, and Sergei covered the mouthpiece and asked, “Do you need the courtroom cleared for this?”

“I don’t see any reason to,” Muriel said. “I have nothing to hide.”

The President went back to the phone and spoke for a bit, put the receiver down, and said, “Then we can go, now, if you don’t mind.”

“I’ve got the image, Muriel,” Mata said.

“Then let’s go,” said Muriel, and they translated out, complete with the bodies.

The courtroom was packed. There was even media there. The case that had been interrupted was a high profile one involving a high ranking official caught in a scandalous situation. The addition of Sergei, Muriel, the general and the attendant individuals and bodies created something of a stir.

“Well, Mister President?” the judge asked.

“Your Honor, this General of the Army came to my office with troops, including the two



bodies you see, there, demanding that I get the Ambassador for Home there immediately. He did not specify why. I called Muriel and asked her to come. In the course of the conversation she suggested that the military either wanted to try to force her to train them or force her to allow them to invade another country currently under the protection of Home. She asked me to call her back with their answer. At that point, the General ordered two of his men to hold me at gunpoint, then ordered me to get her to my office. I called Muriel back, and she agreed to come. As she walked through the door two soldiers grabbed her and the general made his demands. Muriel killed the two threatening me, put a noose around the general's neck, and threw off her guards. Threatening me, the President, is an act of treason. Assaulting an Ambassador is an act of war."

"Your Honor, if I may?" Muriel asked.

"You are?"

"Muriel, the Leader of Home and Ambassador from Home to the people of earth," she replied, and a gasp went up from the audience.

"Proceed, Ambassador."

"This disk holds a record, recorded by me and by my security squads, of the events. You are welcome to view it at your leisure. In addition, supplemental information is on this pair of disks showing the reason for and attack on the American Enclave, the removal of a country's military capability, and the subsequent removal of that country's government and the assumption of control by Home. The disks are marked on the cases and disks as to which section of the supplemental information it contains. This country is the one that this general intended to invade. Being under the protection of Home, both for itself and for Russia, his attempt to invade is, itself, an act of war."

"Ambassador, is there a reason that the bodies were brought?"

"Continuity of evidence, Your Honor. If you would prefer, I will remove their identification and personal effects, and destroy the bodies."

"You can do that?" the judge asked.

"Yes, sir."

"Then, if you would please."

"Mata, I need two evidence bags, marked one and two," Muriel said. Then appeared to think for a moment, and two groups of personal effects appeared in the air. Mata produced the evidence bags, open, and the effects were deposited inside. The bags were sealed, and Muriel signed them and handed them to the President. He signed acceptance of them, and held onto them. Muriel then destroyed the bodies, turning them into subatomic particles.

"Now then, general, did you in fact intend to invade a foreign country? Oh," he broke

off and turned to Muriel, "what country was it?"

"The People's Republic of China, Your Honor."

"WHAT?" and he started laughing. "Home took over all of mainland China?" he managed to sputter out.

"And such offshore islands and territories as paid allegiance to it, Your Honor. It's now under the administration of an Envoy trained Ambassador of Home that is native to the country," Muriel replied, with a smile.

When the judge finally settled down, he asked the general, "Did you really intend to invade China?"

"This is outrageous. Are you going to take the word of a mere girl?"

"Answer the question, general. Just 'yes' or 'no'."

"Yes," the general growled.

"And did you order your men to hold the President and put a gun to his head?"

"Yes."

"And did you order your men to hold the Ambassador?"

"Yes."

"Did you know she was also the Leader of Home?"

"Yes."

"There being no facts in dispute, and you having confessed in court in front of all these witnesses, I find you guilty of high treason. You will be taken to prison, there to await your execution at their earliest convenience. I believe that would be tomorrow morning," the judge said. "Now, Ambassador, what shall I do with these others?"

"Your honor, whatever pleases you. I stopped what I saw as an injustice to a defenseless nation. I protected a man that was threatened with deadly force, meeting it with deadly force. I protected myself from abduction with non-life threatening force. Unless something I did warrants your investigation, I'm done," Muriel said.

"I do have a question. Are you saying that you won't train Russians?"

"No, Your Honor. We will train anyone that can pass the basic test. Those that are aggressive or destructive, like the general, wouldn't be able to pass that test. And any military that had the Envoy training wouldn't have been able to act on his behalf."

“Ambassador, what is this basic test?”

“A person has to be able to make a mental link with his trainer. Oh, we'll coach and coax them through the procedure. It isn't real difficult. Except for people that have something to hide. Aggressive people that want to take from others, destructive people, some politicians, some religious people – basically it boils down to bullies – can't open up enough to pass the test. And all the training is either given through or monitored through that link. Heck, sir, I've just been waiting for Sergei to come tell me that he'd like to have some people tested. I'd be over here so fast it would make even his head spin, and he knows how fast I can move.”

“So, what's happening in China, then.”

“The last information I had, Your Honor, was that Ambassador Chun had taken charge. The old government was destroyed for having attempted to kill me. Oh, they were given a choice of living under Home rule or death. They chose death. Even the building was destroyed. All of China now operates under Home rule.”

“And what are those rules?”

“Breaking the peace is against the law.”

“That's it?” the judge asked.

“That's it, sir. But think about it. Most activities end up with breaking the peace in one way or another. Belligerent? Drunk? Robbery? Assault, of course. Drugs? That one's their problem. They'll just kill themselves. What the PRC did in sending missiles to me? Definitely breaking the peace. In fact, it was an act of war. So far, all we've found the need for is just 'breaking the peace'.”

“And who decides the punishment?”

“The representative of Home, the Ambassador. And yes, she has plenipotentiary powers. Because of the ability to link, mentally, if she has any questions she can ask them. But we trust her judgment, her ability to make decisions based on the circumstances.”

“Unbelievable. What a way to run a government,” the judge said.

“Well . . . it really isn't a government as such. We're administrators. Our job is to keep the services running, keep food on the table, keep a standard of living available to as many people as possible, and as a side issue, to weed out those that would try to grab more than their share or bully others. The difference is the Envoy training, and the fact that those that pass it, and everybody that takes it passes it, realize the importance of balancing their lives. If they make a mistake, they have to correct it. If they do something against another person, then they are expected to make restitution. The balance is what actually rules, and it's individual, not government imposed. And that's what judgment is all about, when you go to

Home. Those with the training have done so, voluntarily, and under their own power. Having experienced it once, then the trainee understands the serious importance of maintaining their balance.”

“You're saying that having the training can straighten out the social problems in a society?” asked the judge.

“Well, they can certainly help. As long as there are untrained people in the population, then there is the chance of problems,” Muriel replied.

“Well, as delightful as finally meeting you and hearing about what the training is, I should probably get back to work,” the judge said. “President, what do you want to do with these others?”

“Leave them to me,” Sergei said. “I'll ask Muriel to take them back to my office, and have them held until I know what to do with them, myself. It's possible they were duped, themselves.”

Muriel translated them all back to Sergei's office. Once there, she went to the two men that she thrown against the wall. “Hold still. Um, hum. Concussion. This will just take a second. There. Now you. OK, just a nasty bump and a little whiplash. Better?”

“You would heal them? Are you a doctor, too?” asked Sergei.

“Battlefield first aid. Everyone that passes the training gets it. It's not a full doctor's course, but it can help in emergencies. Sergei, we need to talk. You've been dithering over whether or not to let people have the training. You're worried that the wrong ones would get it. The first test, making a mental link, filters out the bad ones. So, just line up some people and let me test them. Common, ordinary people. And include that judge. He leaks, mentally, and may be able to pass the test. I'll even test you privately, if you like, so no one will ever have to know.”

“Muriel . . . I . . . .”

“What are you afraid of? That it will change your society? It will. That it will change your culture? It needn't. But that is up to you and your people,” Muriel said.

“It's complicated.”

“Meaning, it's political. Well, I can't help you there. My usual method of dealing with politics is to have them arrested or killed. Mostly, the first. You know where I am, Sergei, and you know I'll help. I'm not really a monster, I just play one.” And Sergei laughed. “OK, Muriel, let me think about it.”

Muriel asked, “So, what do you need, here?”

“Nothing. Thank you for dealing with the general,” he said.

“No problem.” And Muriel and her security squads translated out.

# Chapter 10

## Another Country Heard From (Friday afternoon)

"Muriel, the Pope's secretary is on the line. He wants to set up an appointment with you for the Pope."

"Oh, good grief. Well, it's not going to happen. You KNOW what this is all about. Another bullying session with some religiosity," Muriel said, in disgust.

"He really insists that you must have this meeting. He doesn't quite threaten dire things, but I think he's about to."

"Yea, I'll just bet. He'll tell all his 'flock' that they aren't allowed to have the training. That anybody that does will be excommunicated. OK, where is the Pope, now?" Mata showed her. "Good. You grab the secretary, I'll grab the Pope. Be prepared for feathers, super glow, and black eyes." The maneuver resulted in the Pope and his secretary seated on the couch in Muriel's casual area.

As they started to get up, Muriel said, "Sit. By what right do you DEMAND that I make an appointment to see you? You are not in authority over me. I am not even a member of your church. Such absurd behavior from you. You should know better. But you've closed your mind to reality, and have tried to force the world back into the Dark Ages with your petty rules. You have done a great deal of harm in the name of one who supposedly did so much good, according to your books. Well, now you've got your meeting. I'm half tempted to just take you to Home and let you see just how wrong you are, but the judgment would probably kill you, you've done so much harm."

"Daughter . . . ," began the Pope.

"I am NOT your daughter," Muriel said, standing up and beginning to glow. "I am so far from your daughter that you can't even conceive of who and what I am." The glow increased. "Many beautiful works of art have been created for you and your petty religion. And you've used them to try to hide the atrocities that that religion has been responsible for. How DARE you attempt to control me. Your petty threats of what you'll ORDER your followers to do. You have made war on society, and I'm half minded to have you charged with war crimes because of it. Power grubbing, greedy little pig." By now, Muriel was glowing so bright that her figure was almost indistinct. And her eyes were glowing black.

"But you don't understand . . . ."

"Oh, I understand perfectly. You've sent out enough feelers and made enough proclamations in the past four years that I understand you completely." Then she played the trump card – the 'A' card. She grew, and wings appeared on her back. "You will speak no

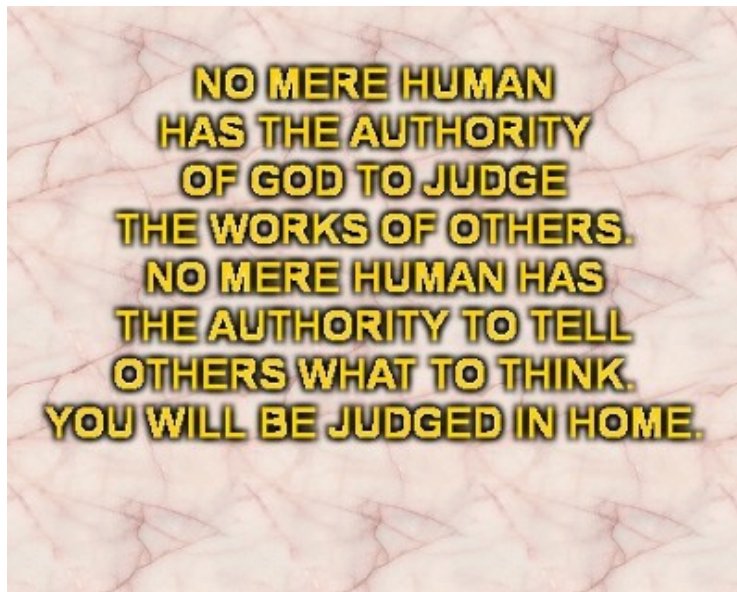
more about things of which you have no knowledge.”

::Mata, grab a squad. We're taking them back, and this pipsqueak is about to find out what a proclamation really is.::

Mata just laughed and asked, ::Full regalia?”

::Oh, definitely. I'm in a mood for throwing my weight around. Throne room, I think. It's time it was made plain to the world that this church is a liar. I want this recorded and sent to every media outlet in the world.::

They translated out. As they translated into the Pope's throne room the Pope and the secretary were set in chairs facing the throne. The squad and Mata appeared, ranged three and three on either side in an arc. All over-sized, wearing wings, and carrying swords of flame. And Muriel spoke, in a voice that could be heard all over that Catholic complex, and as she spoke words appeared on the wall, embedded into the wall, of pure gold.



The letters, burned into the marble wall, discolored the stone slightly, and took on a glow of their own. Muriel stepped between the chairs holding the Pope and his secretary, and an over-sized sword appeared in her hands. She grew to the point where the sword almost appeared to be a toy, inverted the sword and thrust it straight down through the front of the throne embedding it in the marble beneath.

“SACRELIGE!” said screamed the Pope.

**NO, YOUR UNHOLYNESS. ONLY TRUTH. ONE YOU WILL KNOW ALL TOO SOON. I SUGGEST THAT YOU LOOK TO THE HARM YOU HAVE CAUSED PEOPLE AND TRY TO CORRECT IT. SO FAR, NOT ONE POPE HAS SURVIVED THE JUDGMENT OF HOME. IF YOU ARE FAST ENOUGH, AND THOROUGH ENOUGH, YOU JUST MIGHT BE THE FIRST.**

**IT IS FINISHED.** Muriel and the squad and Mata translated out.

“Here, Mata. Here's the whole thing from my perspective. Add what you feel is right, and send it out, please. And I hope this is an end to it,” Muriel said, tiredly.

“The wall and the throne are shielded. The building could crumble and they would still exist,” Mata said.

“You, too? Then here's hoping that the message lives a long time. I've tried to be gentle with them. I've tried to get them to understand. But they persisted in handing down absurd 'proclamations' to enslave the people. They never understood that their way didn't work for everyone, and meddled in politics. I feel dirty, having to deal with him.”

“He will be the last Pope, you know. You made it impossible for any other to sit on the Papal throne,” Mata said.

“I know. I also know that I was once again irreligious. The last thing I said to him were the last 'mortal' words of his deity. That god-awful religion was the most corrupt, bigoted, disgraceful invention of men that ever existed. Their deity was one of peace, and they made wars. Theirs was supposed to be one of compassion, and they abused women children. Theirs was supposed to foster equality, and they tried to enslave women right into the twentieth century. Maybe the twenty first. He won't survive, you know. He doesn't have enough time left to rectify all the wrongs he's committed, even just as Pope.”

“There's nothing you can do about that. He created his own mess. Why don't you visit Chun, and see how she's doing?” asked Mata.

“Too soon. She needs time to sort things out and get things working before I show up. Otherwise, she'll think that I don't trust her to do her job,” Muriel replied. “Though I WOULD like to see that office of hers. From what you've said, it's beautiful.”

“It is, that. Even if I'm only getting it second hand from the Envoys on the scene. Oh, oh. The media just noticed our disk. This should be interesting. You may have something to do, yet,” Mata said with a grin.

They watched the newscast special through to the end. “Well,” Mata said, “Expect sharp torches and flaming pitchforks. And wooden stakes. Though how anyone could digest them is beyond me. Oh, and I just got word. That went out all over the world at about the same time. I can almost hear the screams of the faithful and the outrage of the outrageous clergy, now,” she added and laughed.

Ted came in. “What have you done?” It wasn't an accusation.

“Just what you saw,” Muriel replied.

“Ted,” Mata said, “the Pope's secretary insisted that Muriel make an immediate



appointment with the Pope to confess her sins. She's not Catholic. He overstepped his bounds so far that I'm surprised he didn't trip over them. We've tried to be gentle with him and his church. But demanding that Muriel submit to his judgment really was the last straw. No one will ever be able to claim the authority he took for himself again."

"He's dead." Muriel said.

"What?" Ted asked.

"Oh, not by my doing. I think the realization of what he'd attempted got to him, and his heart failed. I felt him go, and mentally followed his soul. His soul went Home, and the judgment took him. He suicided," Muriel said. "The Catholic church is now without a leader, and the way the Bishops and Cardinals are reacting, it may never have another. They've seen my proclamation and the sword in the throne, and are all in a tizzy."

"Muriel, the media is gathering at the gate."

"Let them wait. The Cardinals and Bishops have decided to confer. Separately, I might add. I think it's time I gave them an ultimatum. Mata, is there a way that I can appear to walk in out of nothing?"

"You mean walk in as if from a distance, even though the wall is in the way? Yes, you could do it by image, like you used on Fran's churches," Mata replied.

"Hmm. That gives me an idea. OK, I'm going to Home, and will project from there."

"DON'T step on the dead lot. I'm not sure what it would do to you," Ted said.

"No, I'll start from the edge of the square, and walk in. With the square still around me."

"You'll trigger the judgment in them," Ted said.

"Yes," Muriel said, looking at Ted. "Yes. I intend to."

"Wait! I need to set this up," Mata said. "And take the squads with you. You may be able to do them both at the same time."

"How?"

"Because I won't be in the image. I'll be recording it from the point of view of the assembled clerics. And we'll send that to the media, too," Mata said. "I need to have two Envoys to hide at the other end of the tables from you to project it. Caleb and Mark, I think. Hold on." Mata held a mental conversation with the two, then said, "OK, that's set up."

"Very well, let's go." Muriel translated out. And in to Home, at the edge of the vacant lot that Ted made of the hill and the throne. The four squads made a narrow 'V' to either side

of her, the squad leaders in front of the line. And Mata was some distance away, directly in front of her. Muriel walked forward, creating the image of her walking into the room, and drawing judgment square with her. Finally, she stopped.

"It is finished," she said, in her soft voice. "There will be no more proclamations from you. You would do best to close down your organization and make a museum of this edifice to the terror and abuse that you have heaped upon civilization all these years. You will no longer terrorize the people. You will no longer abuse their children. You will no longer make second class citizens of women. Let your judgment of Home show you how wrong you were, and guide you to repair the damage you've caused." And she triggered the judgment. She waited until the screams and crying had subsided, then added in a soft, sad voice, "I do not judge you. You judge yourselves, your lives, and the lies you have committed yourselves to. Had you listened to me even a year ago, none of this would be necessary. Now? Now the only way out of what you have discovered about yourselves is to go all the way through to the end. This is just a preview. If you do not correct your errors and make right the wrongs you have committed against the world, then you will go through it again at your death. And it will be so much worse for you, then, for you will have no way to regain your balance." And Muriel turned and walked back to the edge of the square, walking out of their chambers and disappearing from their sight.

"OK," Mata said. "We got both of them at the same time. Caleb got the Cardinals, and fed them the image you projected. Mark did the same thing with the Bishops."

"I wondered why I felt like I was seeing double. That didn't happen with the churches."

"That's because you were projecting yourself. This time it was Caleb, Mark and I that did the projecting, and the feedback was what you got. Sorry about that. We'll have to do some experimentation. Disks are going out, now. I added a note, 'if they are righteous, why do they scream and cry?'" Mata said.

"That's wicked, Mata."

"I know. Like something YOU'D do," Mata said, grinning at her. "The media is still out front."

"Any idea what they want?"

"Not yet. Bob's guys are keeping them from entering. Gently. Just saying that you're busy, and can't be disturbed right now."

"Oh, I'm disturbed, all right," Muriel said. "This was so unnecessary. So, what do I tell the media?"

"The same thing you told them," Mata said.

"No, I'll go out," Ted said. "I'm your second, after all. And no, I'm not going to candy coat it for them. What the Pope did was uncalled for. You HAVE been gentle with them,

trying to get them to understand that they were NOT the authority and had no right to inflict such abuse on their congregations. They refused to listen, then attempted to get you to heel like a dog. I think that image of the throne with the burning sword stuck through it and not burning it, and the words burned into the wall with gold will be one that will stick with that religion for all time. You created a miracle that they won't be able to explain. It might even give the others a warning not to follow that path. I'll be right back."

He translated out, and they heard his words, "Folks, the behavior of the Pope was uncivilized and uncalled for. He attempted to get a head of state to heel like a dog. And as you all know, Muriel doesn't bully worth a damn. So, she took him back to the Vatican, and made a proclamation of her own, and punctuated it with a flaming sword. As for the Bishops and Cardinals, their whole purpose in conferring was to try to see how they could recover their lost power. And she showed them. She brought judgment square to them and let them see themselves and all their faults, and how wrong they were. Look at the record for yourselves. Why else would they scream and cry the way they did? Now, they have the opportunity to change. If they had waited until they'd died and found themselves on judgment square, it would have been too late. They wouldn't be able to correct things, then. And right now, you DON'T want to see her. She's angry, and rightly so. There's nothing so stupid as a pig-headed bully that thinks that the way things were is the way they will always be. They've been spanked for their efforts. And she was forced to do the spanking. Wouldn't you be angry in a situation like that? Religion is a work of man, and has no basis in reality. And at least one religion has just discovered what reality is. That's your story."

When he translated back in, he had an evil grin on his face. "OH! That was fun. If that doesn't quiet them, I'll put it a little stronger."

"Stronger! Stronger than what? That just about singed MY ears, and I'm on your side," Muriel said.

"Well, I could have said that 'faith' is a five letter word that ranks right up there with a four letter word starting with 'F'," Ted said, and smiled sweetly

"No, your second word is a lot more fun . . . or so I've been told," Muriel said, and her grin was NOT sweet. Then she added in her quiet, sweet voice just dripping of sincerity, "I, of course, wouldn't know from personal experience. After all, I'm sweet and innocent."

"Uh, huh," Ted said without any belief. "Now, what if they manage to find a way to come back from this?" he asked .

"I'll put screamers in every room of the Vatican that emit not only varying high pitched loud screams, but subsonics that would drive them into depression or even insanity. Once the building is evacuated, I WILL turn it into a museum of terror and abuse, and open it to the world. 'Behold the scum of the earth'," Muriel said.

"You really don't like religions, do you?" Ted asked, making the question a statement.

"Oh, I don't care what people believe. What I don't like is when some bigmouth

decides he has the right to tell ME what to believe. And, most particularly, when what he believes flies in the face of what I KNOW – reality. And to have the audacity to try to call me in on the carpet. Grrr!”

“Your eyes are glowing. Again,” Mata said.

“I know. And I'm sorry,” Muriel said. “Oh, oh. BATTLE STATIONS, INTRUDER ALERT!”

A four foot miss-guided missile catapulted through the door and aimed at Muriel, making a direct hit. “Muriel!” she exclaimed as she jumped into her arms.

“Hi, Hanna,” Muriel grinned.

# Chapter 11

## From Here to Everywhere (Friday, later afternoon)

"Oof! You're getting heavy. You grew some since I last saw you," Muriel said, putting her down.

"Well, you grew some, too!" Hanna exclaimed.

"I guess that we're just a grew some pair, aren't we?" Muriel replied. Mata looked up with her hands held, palm up, to either side. Ted just covered his eyes and shook his head.

"How long did that take you to think up, Muriel?" he asked.

"Oh about a split second. You KNOW I don't think about them. They just happen, like kids," she replied.

"Oh, no! You're not getting ME involved in that discussion," Ted shot back.

"So, young lady, what brought you here?" Muriel asked.

"My feet," Hanna said. Ted went back to shaking his head. "I want to learn how to go from one place to another, like mommy and daddy do." THAT brought a reaction.

"OK, I can understand you wanting to. But, the real question is, 'are you mature enough to handle the responsibility?' You can't just take off and go places and not let people know. Or go places that you shouldn't."

"I know. And I know that mommy and daddy want to talk to you about it. You and Ted both. Maybe some others," Hanna said. "Oh, Brenda, too."

"And Fran, I think," Muriel said. "She knows you pretty well, too." Muriel sent a request to Fran to come to her office. "Are your parents and Brenda coming?"

"Yea. They told me to come ahead and let you know what was going on."

"Well, you did that, all right," Muriel said as Brenda and Hanna's parents arrived.

"I take it she told you," her father said.

"Yep. So, do we talk about it with her here, or do we send her out and talk behind her back," asked Muriel.

"I'm not falling for that one. You've never yet excluded her from any discussions. She

stays,” Dave said. “It’s about her, it’s her right to have some input.”

“Good man. I didn’t think you’d fall for that one,” Muriel said, grinning. “So, let’s sit and see what happens.” And she made a recliner for Hanna, like hers but a bit smaller. So, young lady,” she said when they were seated, “why now?”

“Well,” Hanna said, as Fran came in and sat down. “You know how, when you’re a baby, your parents carry you or have you in a stroller, or something. Then you get older and you walk, holding their hand. Then older still, and they don’t make you hold their hand anymore, but they’re watching to be sure you do things like crossing streets right? And so on? Well, I think it’s time for me to start walking on my own, holding their hand. So I can start learning what to look out for, and things like that.”

Fran’s eyebrows met her hairline with that statement. Ted sat up straighter, and Brenda just looked smug. Her parents didn’t look shocked at all.

Muriel just smiled and said, “That’s quite a statement, Hanna. Where’d you get the information from?”

“Brenda. She was always cautioning me to let things go one step at a time, and not push. And I got to thinking about the way kids learn how to go to school on their own, and stuff. Yea, I want to do more. But I understand, too, that people need to know that I’m responsible, and can do things right. I don’t mean to push, but it seems to me that if I’m allowed to go from place to place linked to someone that I could learn more about it, so I COULD be responsible,” Hanna said, hopefully.

“Dave, Helen?”

“We’ve talked. I mean the three of us,” Dave said. “She was the one that said that nothing should be done until we talk to you.”

“I have told her about what I look for when I’m translating, and how dangerous it can be. I’ve even let her see images of what I look for. I think she’s ready,” Helen added.

“Brenda?”

“She never talked to me about it. I brought it up, one time, and she simply said that it wasn’t going to happen until everybody was sure that she could behave herself. However . . . I’ve been teaching her how to use shields. She could have made that chair, herself. Maybe not as fast, yet, or as well, but she could have done it. She still needs coaching on some things, but she listens, she obeys instructions, she doesn’t get upset with going slowly and practicing. I think she’s ready to learn more.”

“Fran?”

“I’m listening. Listening to what she says, and listening to the way she thinks. She’s not anxious, like kids can be. She wants to learn, but she also wants us to know when she’s

ready. SHE thinks she is, and basically what she's asking is do WE think she is. I do.”

“Ted?”

“I’m still flabbergasted by her first statements. She’s thought this out, come to us to present her case, and appears to be willing to accept what we say. Yea, I’d say she’s exceptional in that way. I’ll go along with it. What about you?”

Muriel looked at Hanna. “Hmm. I think I need to talk to Hanna, alone, for a couple of minutes. Come, Hanna,” she said, and got up and went out front of her office. Hanna followed her.

“Hanna, part of being able to translate is the ability to create an image of where you want to go, then cause that image to show you what’s actually there. Can you still make a link to me?”

“Sure. You’re easy to link to,” and she suited actions to words by making a solid link.

“Good,” Muriel said. “So, I’m going to show you an image of a place that I know, but you don’t. The front desk of the office of the attorneys for Enclave. You’ve never been there, have you?”

“Nope. I didn’t even know Enclave had lawyers.”

“OK, you’re going to be able to see and here everything that I do.” ::Susan, I’m doing a training run. Any reason why I shouldn’t use your front desk, today?::

::Nope, Muriel. It’s all quiet. Anyone I know?::

::I doubt it. I’ll introduce you when we get there. May be a couple of minutes.::

::Any time, Muriel. But thanks for the warning.::

::I’ve startled Susan, the receptionist, a few times. That’s why I try to warn her if I’m going to pop in,:: Muriel sent with a grin. ::So, here’s what I image – things I know are there, or remember well. Then, I just let reality fill in the blanks and make it clear by reaching out to that spot. Then, I look around. I wouldn’t want to translate into someone. Now, I want you to do the same thing.::

::OK. Long, plain desk, like an arc. Off white walls, wood floor. Then reach out to the site and try to actually see it. GOT IT!:: and the girl’s image sharpened up to reality, including Susan.

::Good. Now, bring that picture, that image closer to you, like you were already standing there.::

::First, look around,:: Hanna said, ::so I don’t run into anyone.:: And she did, Then

brought the image in so it settled around them. ::HEY! We're there!::

"Susan," Muriel said, "this is Hanna. She's ten years old, and wanted to learn about translating. Hanna, Susan is the receptionist, here. She's a good friend of mine, and puts up with my teasing."

"Hi, Susan. I'm pleased to meet you."

"Susan," Bethany came out through the doors on the left, "is there some . . . OH! Hi, Muriel. Something we can do for you?"

"Training run. Hanna, this is Bethany, the office manager for the lawyers. Another friend of mine."

"EVERYBODY'S your friend, Muriel. Hi, Bethany. I'm sorry if we're causing a problem. I wanted to learn about translating, and Muriel brought me here."

"It's no problem, Hanna. Things are quiet, right now. You aren't disturbing anything."

"OK, Hanna, do you remember what the doors to my office look like from the street?"

"I think so," Hanna said, and made an image. It was fuzzy, at first, then suddenly sharpened, showing the people in Muriel's casual area through the window. "I cheated. I knew mommy and daddy were in there, so I focused on them." She 'looked around' and saw no one in the street, then drew the image in so it was like she was actually standing there.

"Very good, Hanna. And we're here," Muriel said with a grin.

"Hey, how'd you do that?"

"Oh, I just keyed off your image, so I knew where you were going, and checked it to be sure it was the right place, then followed you."

"Followed . . . wait a minute. Didn't you do it?"

"Nope. I didn't 'do it' going to the lawyer's office, either. You did. I just paralleled you – used your image to check that it was the right place and went when you went. YOU translated both places. And now, I think we need to tell your parents how good you are," and she led Hanna back into her office.

"OK," Muriel said to Hanna's parents, "she can make an image from an image, and can create her own image from what she remembers. She'll need practice on imaging, and a little more confidence in actual translation, but she made the move both ways without more than coaxing. And Brenda, you're right. She follows directions very well. I see no reason she shouldn't be taught to translate."

"You . . . she . . . ," said Helen.



"Sometimes, the only way to find out if a person is ready is to just do it. Oh, I paralleled her and was ready to pull the plug if she didn't do it right. But she translated to the lawyers office and back without any serious problem. She just needs the practice so she can do it with confidence when she needs to," Muriel said. "Oh, and practice with imaging. She said she cheated on the way back. Her image of the front of my office was fuzzy, so she looked for her parents inside, and that firmed it up."

Meanwhile, Hanna had quietly gone to her seat, and sat there looking dazed. "Hanna?" Dave asked, "are you all right? You're trembling."

"I did it? Both ways. But if I'd got it wrong, where would I have been?"

"That's why trainees are paralleled until they're comfortable doing it, Hanna. So they don't end up where they don't want to be," Fran said. "And so they have the confidence to come back if they DO find themselves where they don't want to be," she added, and shuddered. "Sorry, sometimes that trip still gets to me. The memory of how confused and scared I was, even when I managed to get back." And, in her mind, she was still the scared, confused twelve year old girl that had been snatched on her first translation to Home.

"OK," Muriel said, "What she needs now is familiarity – practice. And lots of it. Give her places she knows to go back and forth to, then expand from there. The same way a child learns a neighborhood. Then more practice going places she's never been. From what I see, she's not headstrong. She'll listen, and I think she understands why there are rules. It isn't really to hold her back, but to help build her up. By the way, Hanna. Mata still checks me when I translate. She thinks I don't know, but I notice such things."

"I DO NOT!" Mata said. Muriel just raised her eyebrow. "Well, maybe a little. But I don't mean to do it because I don't trust you." Muriel lowered the eyebrow and raised the other one. "All right! I check you. But Ted told me to do it." That caused both eyebrows to raise. And Hanna was laughing.

::Muriel, have you got a moment?: Chun sent to her.

::What's up?:

::I thought you'd like to see my office. And Mata said that you had a new trainee,:: Chun sent. ::How would she like to see a whole different place? It would give her another safe place to go to.::

::Hold on, I'll ask. You may end up with a crowd, though. Fran, Ted, Mata, her parents, and her security guard, Brenda.::

::No problem If you like, connect me to her, and I'll give her the image, directly.::

::OK, hold on.::

"Hanna, a friend of mine has a new office, and asked if I'd like to see it. I think you might enjoy it, too." Mata raised her eyebrows, and Muriel just nodded. "She's an Ambassador, so her office would be another safe place for you to go in an emergency. Would you like to see it?"

"Is it very far?" Hanna asked.

"Oh, not that far, for us," Muriel said, and Ted's eyebrows went up. "Why don't I introduce you to her, so she can give you the image directly. I haven't seen it, myself, so I can't give it to you. We'll all go. Stand up. I think we all need the break."

::Hanna, this is Chun. Ambassador Chun. She's Chinese, but speaks very good English. Chun, my ten year old prodigy, Hanna, who is just learning to translate.::

::Hello, Hanna. Would you like to see my office and where I live?: Chun asked, sending a teaser image of the front of her building.

::YES! Oh, yes. Oh, sorry, I'm pleased to meet you, Chun. Yes, that looks pretty.::

::Then let me give you an accurate image of where you'll translate to.:: Chun sent the image, a direct look at the front of the building from a little distance, and not a remembered image.

::Oh, wow. OK, I've got it,:: Hanna said, looking around, carefully.

::Remember, Hanna," Muriel said, ::You've got other people with you this time. Make sure they know where we're going, and how we'll come out.:: Hanna looked around at her parents, Ted, Fran, Mata and Brenda, then grabbed Muriel's hand and mentally went back to that image. She sent it to everyone, feeling where they would be. ::Good. So, take us there.:: And Hanna did.

"Oh, wow. This isn't America, is it?" asked Hanna.

"No, this is China," Chun said. "Hello, Hanna. You're as pretty as your mental voice sounds. I'm pleased to meet you in person."

"You're not much bigger than me! I mean, you SOUND bigger, in my mind," Hanna said, and Chun laughed.

"No, I'm not much bigger than you. But a LOT older. Come, see what the Envoys built for me." And Chun led the way through her own 'whoosh doors', and into her office.

"I'm sorry, Chun. I didn't mean any disrespect."

"I know you didn't, Hanna. And I didn't take it like that," Chun said. "I was young, once, myself. Believe it or not. And I know what it's like to have an idea of what someone is like, then actually meet them for the first time. And in a whole different country, that's got to

be even more of a shock. And this is my brother, Huang Fu. He's my security chief and the one that trained me."

"I'm pleased to meet you Huang Fu. I'm Hanna. You're different." Hanna looked at Chun's security squad, then at Huang Fu, then Chun, then Muriel, then back at Huang Fu.

"She's quick, sister."

"I know," Chun said.

"I'm sorry, didn't I pronounce your name right?" Hanna asked, with a puzzled look on her face, and still looking around.

"You did fine. Chinese is what's called a tonal language. It isn't really the tone, as much as it is whether things are pitched high or low. I wouldn't expect someone not used to it to be absolutely correct. But you did pretty good," Huang Fu said.

"You're not really here, are you. Or, I mean, you don't have a body," Hanna said, still puzzled.

"You're right. I died a long time ago. But when we had some trouble, here, I came back from Home to protect my sister. So, I don't really have a body. Just a soul. Like the Envoys."

Hanna looked hard at Huang Fu. Then looked at the squad members, who all smiled at her, then at Mata. "Soul. And body. Envoys are soul. Humans are soul in a body," she said, almost under her breath. Then her eyes widened, and she stood up straighter. "Humans are a physical body with an Envoy soul!"

"Brenda, I think your training of Hanna is going to be much easier, now," Muriel said, quietly. "She just connected."

"So did I," Chun said, softly. "Oh, my. This will take some getting used to. And I think Hanna's getting used to the idea faster than I can."

"Don't fight it, Chun. It won't take over. You will still be you," Hanna said, with more confidence than she'd had before. "The body experience is always dominant."

"You know this?" asked Chun.

"I have been many people. And those experiences are available to me, now. But I am still me. Oh, a little more mature, and a lot more confident," Hanna said. "But still little Hanna. And now, I want to see this amazing office, if I may."

## Chapter 12

### And from Everywhere, Back (Friday, early evening)

"I think the first thing we should do is feed you. This must be about the time you have dinner, and I could do with something, myself. What would you people like. If it's produced anywhere in the world, we can recreate it, here," Chun said.

"Chun, we can't put you to that trouble," Muriel said.

"No trouble. I've got four cooks in my security squads, and they enjoy a challenge," she said, grinning.

"So, how are things going for you?" asked Ted.

"Truthfully, rocky at first. Then my brother flooded the country with Envoys to train those that were trainable. Now, things are under control. The last of the communist administrators was jailed for breaking the peace, and has discovered that the 'sheep' have a new shepherd, and the wolves are no longer in charge. He'll come around. It's hard to arrest people that can't be touched, especially when your police force defects. And that's happened all over," Chun said. "The border guard has returned to Home, with my thanks for their help. I don't know if you know, but after I was trained, they worked their way in toward the center of the country, training people as they came. We now have seventy percent of the people trained. We may have missed a few, but if so their neighbors will train them."

"So, it's over?" Ted asked.

"Nope. Not even close. There's still pockets of resistance. And some of the hard-core communists went into the wild. It'll probably be years before we clean them all out," Chun said. "But they can't do any harm to villages and farms. We've got power stations up in all the cities, so electricity, water and sewage are taken care of. We'll be licensing patents from your hot-shot engineer for cars and trucks, and replace all the dirty fuel burners. We may have a market in Europe, but America is pretty much taken over, now. However, we have a market for cultural clothing, thanks to Carla. Not just ours, which anybody can make now, but many of the other countries that have traditional costumes. Anybody can look rich, now. And, as a country, we don't need much money. Food and clothing can be made, individually. Same with shelter, and people are having a field day making furniture."

One of Chun's security detail came in and took their requests for their meal, offering suggestions at times. With Hanna, he had no trouble. She wanted a hamburger and fries. When he suggested some toppings, like bacon and cheese, she said 'no'. When he reached Mata, he just grinned and handed her a set of kuaizi. "Challenge accepted," Mata said, with a laugh, and a mock punch at the quiet, grinning man.

"So, power, water, sewage are about it for the government to cover," said Muriel.

"And medical," Chun replied. "I think, as long as there are human bodies there will be the need for medical attention. We've got people lining up to take the medical courses. Some of them were Chinese doctors. I mean the traditional ones, not the Western style ones."

"So, what do you need?" asked Ted.

"Nothing you can give me. Time. It's working, but it will take time to get it all together and help to everyone. So, unless you've got a time machine, I'm out of luck," Chun said, grinning. "I'm using all the tricks that you showed me in the American Enclave. Just on a larger scale. Government is down to the same rule you enacted in your Enclave. That just leaves administration, and that's working. Oh, I need more Ambassadors, but I'd rather designate them myself, if that's all right. I know the people, I can tell what ones would be good at the job and not try to take advantage."

"What would they do?" Ted asked.

"Mainly hand out passports and administer an area. That would leave me free to oversee the whole thing, and see that problems in one area didn't slop over into another, or that help was sent from another," Chun said.

"Approved," said Muriel. Ted raised his eyebrows. "Basically, she's doing the same thing with administrative areas as we do with disciplines in education. But she also has a different problem than we do. She's facing keeping a country running smoothly, where we're simply trying to educate the population. I'd bet in time she may learn the other way, but I wouldn't bet much. This is all too new."

"Hmm. OK, I see what you mean. We're working within an existing administrative structure that can be made to work FOR us. She's working from the collapse of the administrative structure, and needs to replace it. OK I'm convinced," Ted said.

"Can I ask you a question?" asked Hanna.

"You are certainly capable of asking a question, and I will even allow it. Whether or not I am able to answer it is a whole other thing," Chun said with a grin.

"Ooo. Yes, it should have been 'may I'. Sorry. The design on your jacket, and on the wall above you. Does it mean something?" Hanna asked.

"As a matter of fact, it does. Colors do, too. So do the designs on my squad's tunics, and that of my brother. The dragon is a special, magical creature. The clouds under its feet show that it's a Celestial creature and . . .," she paused as if in shock, then turned to her brother. "YOU KNEW! Our doctor was the one that suggested I use them because I was the dragon that walked on air. Why didn't YOU tell me?"

“Because you had to find it out for yourself. Other humans could help you, as Hanna did. But YOU had to find out, to make the connection. If I had told you, then you would have just passed it off as some sort of symbology,” Huang Fu said.

“But, you're human.”

“Not any more. No body. So, I am just soul and from Home,” he replied. “But coming from Hanna, and the fact that she accepted it as real, you were able to. Yes, I tossed in a guide, because I knew that it would mean something to our people, even though most don't lend any credence to the old myths and legends and folklore. But the dragon was long held as the symbol of royalty. And a dragon that walked on air was showing that it was Celestial. And your entrance to this city proved that you were something special.”

“Are you manipulating me?” asked Chun, severely.

“No. Guiding you, sometimes. Making suggestions, yes. But you make the decisions on whether to act on those suggestions,” Huang Fu replied, and smiled. “I think it possible that you would have thought of the clouds, yourself, after your entrance to the city. It was a GOOD entrance, and let the whole city see that something special had taken place.”

Chun turned back to Hanna, calmed down, and said, “My brother has told you that the dragon was the sign of royalty. Well, actually, the five toed dragon was the symbol of the Emperor of China, and has since come to be a symbol of China, itself. That it walks on clouds shows that we are all Celestial beings, simply put in terrestrial bodies – human bodies. The azure dragon, on one of my squads, is the symbol of the protector of the East. That it is on one of my squads implies that it's one of my facets.”

“The other symbols,” Chun went on, “also have their meanings. The phoenix, for example. I put it on two of my squads, one on red tunics and one on yellow. If you notice, there is even a slight difference between the phoenixes. One is slightly plumper than the other, and with a slightly shorter tail. That is the royal phoenix. The other is the symbol of the five human qualities of virtue, duty, correct behavior, humanity, and reliability, as well as the generalized strength, resilience, good fortune, opportunity, and luck. The white tiger guards the West, and is the symbol of courage, bravery, and strength.”

“As for poor Huang Fu, that I abuse terribly,” she continued, and he laughed, “his symbol is the Heron, and stands for strength, purity, and long life. That he is an Envoy soul that has been in a human body and returned to Home makes this an apt symbol for him. The dark blue dragon, outlined in gold in my case, is the Celestial dragon that guarded the gates of Heaven – Home, to us. And you, little Hanna, will be such a dragon, I think.” She closed her eyes for a moment, then opened them and held out her hand. On it lay a broach, a miniature of the dragon above her head and on her tunic, but in gold and sapphire. “Please. Take this. If nothing more, then as a remembrance of China and that you were here and are always welcome back.” Hanna took the broach, carefully, until she realized that it was actually an indestructible shield, and pinned it to the shoulder of her dress.

“Now, about the colors. Huang Fu I put in a black tunic. Black is an indeterminate

color. Among the many things that it indicates is that of change – of flowing from one state to another. It isn't lack of will, but rather the change caused by will. Something like a chrysalis that is dormant but will become a butterfly. It is also a symbol of long life.

The blue I took was partly for the dragon, and partly because the color blue signifies conserving, healing, relaxation, exploration, trust, calmness, and immortality. White is the Chinese color of morning. But, more importantly, it is also the symbol for righteousness, pureness, confidence, intuition, strength, organization, and courage, which matches the white tiger.”

“Red,” Chun said, “is normally used for weddings, because it embodies so many things that weddings are supposed to be a symbol of. You might call it a symbol of a symbol,” she said, grinning. “This, in conjunction with the red phoenix that is the symbol of sovereignty, puts a special significance on it. The red phoenix is the symbol for the South. The azure dragon on the green background, the guardian of the East. The green symbolizes anything that grows, as well as striving, refreshing, balancing, calming, healing, self assurance, foundation, benevolence, health, harmony, sensitivity, and patience.

“Last is the phoenix on a yellow background,” she concluded. “That phoenix is the celestial animal of the center – and for the Chinese, the Earth was the center. Yellow was reserved for royalty and particularly of the Emperor. This color symbolizes things that are nourishing or supporting – stabilizing, ripening, grounded, solid, reliability – things, like a sunbeam, warmth, clarity, royalty, good faith, and empathy. I think I got everything. And now I wish I'd called the squads, because they wanted an explanation of them.”

“It's all right,” Huang Fu said. “I relayed it, as well as making a record of it. You now have some happy people, back there. Those are all very positive attributes for them to project. But weren't dragons shape shifters?”

“Not nice, brother. You know as well as I do that they were.”

“And you're saying that you aren't?” Muriel asked, standing up. “Chun, you have put a lot of thought into the symbology you are using. And you're doing it not to drag your people back, but to give them positive influences for their lives. So, we may not be able to completely shape shift – or at least not that I've discovered yet, because we don't want to monkey with a working body. But we have learned a few things that work as well. Mata, would you join me, please?” Mata did, and she and Muriel bowed, Chinese style, to Chun. When they came up, it was with the black panther and wolf heads, and the panther claws.

Chun's eyes went wide at the sight, and her eyebrows went up and threatened her hairline. “This . . . how is this done?”

“Oh, it's all shields, opaque one way, so we can see out of them. Just like making clothes, except that we tie the facial features to our own, somewhat, to give the impressions of talking and emotion,” Muriel said, and changed back to her normal self. “The tiger would be fairly simple to do, being just a version of the cat that the panther is. But the dragon and birds, I just don't know.”

“We do,” said a voice. And the four Envoy leaders of the squads entered and performed the kòu tóu kneeling bow to Muriel. As they came up, they displayed at least the head and neck of the animal symbol on their tunics.

“You should not bow to me,” Muriel said. “It is enough that we are friends.”

“This time, only,” the tiger said. “It is a sign of respect in this culture that we are learning. And you are deserving of respect for discovering a way to add to Chun's mystique. We will teach her, so that she can BE the dragon when she needs to. Many of our people – the Chinese people – still have a vestige of superstition or belief in the legends and folklore. Chun knew this, which is why she chose the symbols we used to enter the city. SHE is the Blue Dragon that Walks On Air. We are her attendants. That is the reason for the symbols and colors she chose. You have done her, and us, a great service, Muriel.” The leader of the Azure Dragon squad looked at Chun and grinned. Shortly, Chun was smiling back at him.

“Like this?” She thought for a moment, then changed her head and hands, and Muriel and her friends were facing a fully formed Chinese blue dragon head.

“Oh, yea. That ought to do it,” Muriel said, and put up one of the 'true image' mirrors for her to see what she looked like.

“Hmm. Yes. I see some changes that need to be made, but this is a good first attempt,” Chun said. “The only thing that worries me is that I will be thought an alien – something not of earth. Science Fiction films have always been popular, here, and many people are gullible.”

“You know,” Muriel said, “in a sense, we are. Something not of earth, I mean. And you may not want to use the blue dragon head on your own people, but there's nothing stopping you from using it on diplomats from other countries, if they need some intimidation to keep them in line. Oh, and I like your signature move – walking on air with lightning and gongs accompanying you. Classy.”

“You know, I did that just to be able to show the people that I was coming in,” Chun said. “But you're right. It has become a bit of a signature.”

“Yep. Something like Prince Taylor and his 'Jolly Greens' that ride 'ghost' horses that aren't really there,” Muriel said.

“I would love to see them. In fact . . . I think I'm going to get my chance,” Chun said, getting up and going to the door. Seven people in green uniforms rode up to the walk to her building and dismounted from the air.

As they approached, one of them asked, “Miss, could you tell me where to find the Ambassador from Home to the people of China?”

“Yes,” said Chun. “About five steps forward.”



"Oh, dear. Oh, I beg your pardon. I'm Prince Taylor, Colonel of the Regiment of Home and Ambassador from Home to Britain. I came on a mission of mercy."

"I am Chun, Ambassador to China, and currently in charge of the Enclave that China is."

"I don't envy you that. I have enough trouble with my small Enclave. Is there anything we can do to help? Oh, these are just my security squad. And please, as you've dispensed with formal titles, just call me Taylor."

"Thank you. Why don't you come in. Your squad can meet mine, and you and I can talk in my office. Please," Chun added. "So, you came just to rescue us?"

"Oh, no. The mission of mercy was to transport food to our Embassy, and find out what the situation was, here," Taylor said.

"It is as you see it. About sixty to seventy five percent of the population is now trained. The rest are either dead, in hiding, or, I think you say, keeping their heads down," Chun said. "And, as long as your Embassy diplomats and people keep the peace, they are welcome to come and go as they please. Like Muriel, that's really the only rule that we have."

"Really? Anywhere?"

"Oh, there are some places that we would prefer they do not go alone," Chun said. "Not because of security or anything, but simply because they are dangerous. We'd be happy to have someone escort and protect them. As for food, they are our guests, of course, so they only have to state their needs and we'll do what we can to supply it. Even importing it for them, if they like. Water, sewage and power have already been switched over for them, without interfering with their property. Medical, well we have Envoy trained doctors in the hospitals, now, or would be happy to have them seen in their Embassy or even here. As an Ambassador with your own Enclave, you know how guest right works. We have only left them alone because of how busy the past few days have been, and because we felt that they might be nervous over the circumstances."

"So, you did it. The whole country is an Enclave?" asked Taylor.

"Yes. And, like every other Enclave of Home, the whole thing is an Embassy. And, unless the diplomats of any of the national embassies behave in suspicious ways – ways that make it look like they would try to take some action against us – we are more than willing to let them be themselves," Chun said. "Taylor, I can't emphasize this too much. The old regime is gone, and with it their tyrannical ways. We do not hold the past against the nations of the world, and ask that they not hold the past against us. Have your national Ambassador come meet with me. We offer what we have, and you know from your own experience, that can be considerable."

"Chun," Muriel said as Chun and Taylor entered her office, "it looks like things are going

to be busy for you, shortly. And we should probably get back, ourselves. I appreciate your letting us come, and even more the company and explanations you've given us. And, especially, your kindness in letting Hanna come. I don't think her smile could be any bigger. You are always welcome in the American Embassy, and you can always ask us to visit. And you, Taylor," she said, not leaving him out, "you already know the drill. Don't be a stranger or wait for some emergency situation to come visit. Your last, though welcome, was way too short." He laughed.

"OK," he said, "I'll try to think of some valid reason for you to come to Britain. Maybe the Queen, my grandmother, would help." And she hit him.

"Cad. Brute. Despoiler of women," Muriel said.

"Why, Muriel! I didn't know you cared!" he said, and she hit him again. And they laughed. Then she had Hanna gather their group together and translate back to her office.

# Chapter 13

## The Unusual is Usual (Saturday morning)

"Mister Ambassador, welcome," Chun said, as he entered her office. "You will disappoint Ambassador Muriel, tremendously. She likes to see people startled by the 'whoosh' doors. Don't tell me you cheated, too," she added with a grin.

"Oh! That. Prince Taylor warned me about them. Told me to just keep walking and ignore them," the man said. "Madam Chun, I was so pleased to hear from the Prince that there would be no difficulties between us. My word, but this is a beautiful office."

"Thank you. The design was by an American girl – one of Ambassador Muriel's friends. And the way she's blended the old China with the new was done with a real understanding of what we are about. We have no problem with the beauty of the past, but look to the future," Chun said.

"Well said, well said. Madam . . . ."

"Just Chun, Ambassador. I have learned that titles can get in the way. We prefer real courtesies to the artificial formalities of the past," Chun said. "If we have to resort to such things, then there is something seriously wrong, between us."

"Ah, well then, I am Edward Fitzgerald. Edward, if you don't mind. Ed always sounded like a horse, and Eddie is something you see at the end of a pulled oar," he said, smiling.

"Edward it is, then," grinned Chun.

"In any case, my purpose in being in China is to see about trade, and to try to determine your country's attitudes toward us," he said.

"Well, taking the second first, we operate under one rule, here. It is against the law to break the peace. The former government did that to the Home Embassy in America, targeting Muriel. She spanked them for that, in the person of your Prince Taylor and his troops," Chun said. "And as for trade, now that most of the population has the Envoy training, our needs are pretty much met. There may be some odd trinkets and such that our people might want from your country. Likewise there may be things that your people will want from ours. But I'm afraid trade, as you are used to, is over."

"Speaking of your recent troubles, we, that is Britain, feels that we should have a major piece of China for our aid in eliminating the military that kept your people down."

"Edward, I suggest that you read the treaty between Home and Britain, and talk to your Prince. I suggest that you also read the warrant under which Prince Taylor acts," Chun said,

softly but firmly. "When he acted against the military of the previous government of China, he was acting on behalf of Home, as Home's representative and using the Regiment of Home. I understand that you might have trouble understanding what appears to be a dual fealty, but there really isn't any difficulty in it. Certainly your Queen has had no difficulty with it, as she was the one to sign the treaty. Your people might, but that is an internal matter. And if your legislature has a problem with it, then they can take it up with the Leader of Home. I'm sure Muriel will be able to set them straight very quickly."

"But," Edward said, "surely you can't claim the entire country! There must be a government for it."

"Oh, Edward, you are still thinking small and old. This is an entirely new situation. The majority of the people of this country are trained in the Envoy techniques. And part of that is being in touch with the balance within themselves. Further, those few left that do not have the training, for whatever reason, are kept in line by the people, themselves," Chun said. "And it isn't so much that we 'claim' the entire country as that it has become an Enclave of Home by the very fact that the people DO have the training. Because of that, they do not need a government to impose rules on them as much as they need an administrator to keep things like water, power, sewage and medical attention available. The people police themselves. Your Embassy has changed with the removal of the old government. Now, you are treating with Home, rather than some nation called the People's Republic of China. Yes, the country is called China, but the administration is with Home and its representatives."

"But really, one must have a government of some sort!"

"Why? To keep the people down? To keep them in their place?" asked Chun. "Not only is that old fashioned, but it's tyrannical. Despotism. Isn't it better to have a people police themselves – people trained to understand when something causes harm to another individual, community or world? Intimidation is NOT the answer to managing people. And yet it seems to be the only way untrained people can consider. Sad, really. And, against the trained, intimidation just doesn't work. No, the Enclave of China needs none of that. Much better to treat with each other in friendship than in force."

"But, that attitude just isn't realistic!"

"Unusual, perhaps, in your world," Chun said. "But here, Edward, the unusual is usual. Take my security squads, for example. All Envoys. And I am human. And my security chief – my brother – is a human that no longer has a body. Unusual? Yes. But it works. Look around and meet the people. Find out for yourself. And DO look at the treaty and Prince Taylor's warrant. You'll find them very educational," she added, with a grin.

"I see. Chun, I'm afraid our legislature doesn't agree with your hypothesis," Edward said. "We will be moving our troops in to establish a real government. It was our troops that conquered this country, and we mean to have it. You will, of course, be allowed to continue here, in this building, as long as you behave yourself. You have no weapons with which to defend such a large area. I suggest that you capitulate, immediately, and tell your people to obey us. We ARE taking over."

"No, Edward, you will not. First, your troops can not even enter this country. Any attempt to will cause your weapons to disappear, and may even result in the loss of their lives. Second, we actually do have the means to defend ourselves against any attack. You have obviously been talking to the wrong people – people that don't know what the Envoy techniques are, or how they may be applied. Third, your attempt to bully me can be construed to be a form of assault – a breaking of the peace. It is also a treaty violation. I'm sorry, Edward," she said, "but you will have to be held for the Leader of Home to decide how this offense will be dealt with."

::Muriel, do you happen to know if Taylor explained the treaty and the warrant he operates under to the British Ambassador?::

::Yes, he did. Why?:: Chun sent a record of the discussion to Muriel. ::Why, that little worm,:: Muriel replied. ::There's one faction of the British Parliament that has been trying to refute the treaty. It's time they were shown the error of their ways. I'll get Taylor and, if possible, the Queen. We may be bringing in those erroneous politicians, too.::

::No problem. He hasn't realized it, yet, but he isn't going any place. He's locked to his chair in my office.::

It was fifteen minutes before the entourage arrived. It was only a couple of minutes before Edward Fitzgerald discovered that he couldn't leave the chair. A minute after that Chun got tired of hearing his vituperative comments, and placed a gag made of a shield over his mouth, then continued on with her work as if he weren't there.

"Chun, I'm so sorry," Taylor said, entering her office. "It was explained to him. I know, because I was the one that explained it. But he was contacted by a faction that still had delusions of empire building and was told that they would be forcing a revocation of the treaty. That move, by the way, fell flat. I have those individuals outside, under shields, and my grandmother will be coming. My father is bringing her."

"Ah, Taylor, you have no reason to apologize to me," Chun said. "I never doubted that you had told him all about it. However, I can't leave this as it is. You say you brought the members of your legislature that wanted to take over China? Where are they?"

"Oh, out front," Taylor said. "They'll be fine, there, until my grandmother has determined what she wants done with them." Muriel came in on the heels of his words, followed closely by Ted.

"Before you ask," Ted said, "I am usually the 'voice of reason' with Muriel, tempering some of her behavior that she might take in anger. I'm not tempering her, on this occasion. The Queen is down there, now, letting them know on no uncertain terms that they have behaved without authority, and that their disgrace will be made public."

Muriel, on the other hand, was in a full lather. "Chun, you have every right to have this piece of excrement killed, if you so choose. That these . . . these . . . bullies ORDERED him

to take action to secure the country for Britain. They even ordered out the military. They made the mistake of also ordering out Taylor and his troops. He literally stopped a legislative session to inform the Queen about what was happening. Silencing the bunch of rowdy fools in the process. They were unanimously voted down by the rest of the House of Lords, and stripped of their seats and status. They are here, now for you to do with them as you wish.”

Chun sighed. “Muriel, will the shields take a rifle bullet?”

“Yes,” Muriel replied. “What have you got in mind?”

“Getting shot. Well, shot at. I DON'T want them to actually hit. But I want them to see that we may not have what they think of as weapons, but we aren't defenseless. In fact, if I could be shot at, repeatedly, that would be even better.”

“OH! Wait a minute. Let me see if she'd free.” ::Melanie, it's Muriel . . . ,:: and she went on to explain what Chun wanted to do.

::Muriel, can you connect me to Chun?::

::Yes, hold on:: “Chun, I have a friend that was a Marine. She remembers the weapon she used when she was an enlisted troop, and can recreate it at will – you know, pull it out of a 'no pocket'. She'd like to talk to you, mentally,” and Muriel gave her the connecting information. After a few minutes of silence from Chun, Melanie appeared in her office in her regular suit.

They stared at each other for a few minutes, then Melanie broke into a smile. “Yes, I can do that. I'll be happy to help in any way I can, Chun. And it's a real pleasure to work with someone else that was trained by Muriel. A REAL pleasure.”

“Oh, dear,” Muriel said. “This is going to be BAD! I'm sorry I introduced you two.” The British Ambassador began to look worried. “Well, if we're going to do it, we might as well get it over with. I'll warn Her Majesty. Hate to have her have a heart attack over this.” And she translated out.

“Come, pond scum. You should see what this has come to, yourself,” Chun said. He wasn't given the ability to respond or even walk. The gag remained in place, and the shield around him brought him upright and carried him out of the office ahead of Chun.

Melanie walked out behind Chun, and angled right. As Chun placed the British Ambassador in front of the assembled lords that had instigated the attempted take-over of China, Melanie took up station about fifty feet away and switched to her old field uniform complete with her old rifle. Chun looked at her, drawing the attention of the men to the 'armed soldier' that now faced her. Then looked back at the men.

“You say we are defenseless,” Chun said. Taylor and his father assured the Queen, in quiet voices, that no one would be hurt. Ted and Muriel just looked on with amusement. “See how defenseless we are,” Chun concluded. Melanie, right on cue, aimed at the Chinese

Ambassador, starting with her ankle and ending with her head. Twenty rounds from a fully automatic rifle ripped the air, and stopped one foot from Chun at their closest.

“Now, Edward Fitzgerald, how defenseless are you?” Chun asked. Melanie made a show of reloading and chambering the first round, then did the same job of stitching up the side of the British Ambassador. Again, the rounds never reached their target. But the effect did.

“Edward Fitzgerald, you came here and raised a stink about China being run by Chinese, and how you felt that it would better serve being owned by Britain. Now, you've raised a different stink – that of your cowardliness. In both capacities you've managed to shame yourself. China is not defenseless. And more than that, China protects those that need protection, just as I protected you from being shot and killed.”

“You also made a big thing of the fact that we have no weapons,” Chun said. “That is not entirely true. We have no military in this country. We need none.” Huang Fu came in with a large boulder floating ahead of him, and placed it on the ground. “You!” Chun said, pointing to one of the lords. Come here. Test this. See if it's real,” she said, handing him a rock hammer. “Break off a piece.” The man did, examining it closely.

When he had resumed his place with the others, Chun said, “Those that have the Envoy training, such as your Prince Taylor, are also capable of reducing such a rock to subatomic particles.” And turned and looked at the rock, which promptly melted into nothing. “The barrier currently around China isn't to protect us. It's to protect you from your own stupidity. Enter this country with aggressive intent, and you would end up like that rock. Gone. China is now the property of Home.”

“You claim that because China was defeated by your Home Regiment, that it is yours by conquest,” Chun said. “Yet you ignore the fact that the Home Regiment's only purpose is to defend, not attack. It serves to protect your Royal Family, and therefore your country. But your Royal Family needed no such protection. The Regiment of Home, which is its proper title, was raised by an Ambassador of Home to defend Home, its people and its property. The People's Republic of China, in their stupidity, attacked the Leader of Home, and the Regiment of Home removed the ability of that governing body to ever repeat their mistake.”

“It was Home that put up the barrier around the country, to protect other countries from being invaded by hordes of desperate, scared people. And to protect China and its people from greedy countries. And to protect the people of China from senseless acts of violence against them. At that point, the government of the People's Republic of China still existed and were trying to figure out how to regain control of the people. It was I that met with them, offered them the opportunity to change and be responsive to the people it had held by force. They refused, and I removed them. That makes me, the Ambassador from home, the successor to that government.”

“I do not rule this country,” Chun added. “I administer those things that the people need. Training – about seventy five percent of the people are now trained in Envoy techniques and WILL defend themselves and their families and friends, their communities,

and therefore their country. Those people now have food, shelter and clothing by their own hands and minds. I see that they have clean water, sewage disposal, power in the form of electricity, and medical facilities. I see that those without the training are provided jobs that are within their capabilities, so that they can enjoy the same benefits. And there are other needs that I will be dealing with to improve what you call the infrastructure of the country.”

“You will be removed from this country, and not allowed to return. Should you persist in your attempt to take over China your actions will be discovered and you will be held responsible for them. There is only one law in this country – it is illegal to break the peace. You have done such, and will be expelled. In this, I am being merciful. I would be within my rights to have you killed. I choose not to. I will let your Queen and your country’s laws deal with you as they see fit,” Chun concluded, with obvious disgust, and turned away.

“Ambassador Chun,” the Queen said, “they WILL be dealt with.”

Chun raised her eyes to the Queen, smiled, and said, “I have no doubt of it. But in private?”

“No,” the Queen replied. “No. This needs to be shown to the world. The world needs to know that China is not defenseless, and can and will protect itself. But that will raise concerns in the minds of others that you will use your abilities to enlarge your borders.”

“Ah. For the record, then. I, Chun, Ambassador for Home and the Dragon that walks on clouds tell you and the world, now. We have no interest in enlarging our borders. We seek only peace. If others choose to join us, freely and without any coercion or subterfuge, we will treat with them in peace and honesty. I know that there has been hard feelings between the People’s Republic of China – that pestilence of communist doctrine – and the Republic of China that is called Taiwan. That is ended. Taiwan can go its own way in peace. If they would like our help, we offer it gladly and with no strings attached. And the same goes for any country that honestly comes to us in peace. So,” she said, after a pause, “does that make you more comfortable?”

“Yes, yes it does,” said the Queen.

“Good. Now,” Chun said, “shall we work out some sort of agreement between us? Or, perhaps it would be better if your legislature were involved. It does men’s egos so much good to feel useful.”

The Queen laughed. “That, Chun, is a remarkably astute observation. And I think that maybe you’re right. Very well. I will have my grandson let you know when it’s prepared, and let you see it and make any changes that you think are necessary. Then we can decide on where to do the signing.”

“Perhaps, if I may suggest, Your Majesty, some neutral country that would feel honored to host such an occasion. That way it wouldn’t look like either country was giving up anything.”



The Queen looked sharply at Chun, then turned and looked at Muriel. "Don't look at me, Your Majesty," Muriel said, holding up her hands, palm outward. "She's perfectly capable of coming up with her own suggestions."

The Queen looked back at Chun. "Well, certainly a good suggestion. And you're right, it would look better that way. Do you have any suggestions as to what country?"

"No, Your Majesty. I thought, maybe you should be the one to decide on the country."

"Hmm. No, I think not. Muriel, can you or Ted act as an impartial party for selecting a country?"

"We can certainly try, Your Majesty. There are still countries that have no Enclave. I think one of them might be encouraged to participate as a neutral observer," acknowledge Muriel. "Perhaps they'd like to see what advantages can be had. How much time do we have to set this up?"

"I'd like to see it signed in the next week or two, but I expect that it'll take longer. It will probably be passed back and forth between Chun and us a few times before it's finalized," the Queen said. "However, I'm going to hold their feet to the fire on this one, starting with showing them this record, so they understand that there will be NO attempts at a land grab, or such."

"Would you mind if we get the United States involved in this, too," asked Muriel. "I think there would be advantages all three ways if we could do it."

"If the government of America can work out the details that fast, then yes. But we won't wait for it to happen."

"Then I'd better get back to the President," Melanie said, "and advise him. There's even a possibility that it could just be an addition to the existing treaty, since that was made with the Leader of Home. Muriel, you'll want to be at the signing between Britain and China, too, even if just to witness Chun's signature," she added, then blinked out.

"Taylor," Muriel said, "do you need a hand carting these critters back to Britain?"

"Nope. I've got troops on the way, and my father can take Her Majesty back."

"I'm coming with you, you young scamp," said the Queen. "It will be me preferring charges against them. If you can get someone at crown court to meet us, it would help things along, greatly."

"I can have Sid do that. He complains that I don't give him enough to do," Taylor said with a grin.

"In that case, Ted and I will return to our Enclave. Chun, you've done a great job. And hopefully, with these treaties in place, you won't have any more problems like it," Muriel said.

“Muriel, thank you for coming and helping out. And for calling in Her Majesty. It was really she that settled things out, by knowing who was behind it, and having Taylor and his father bring them. Internal disputes are easy. International, I don't know as well,” Chun said.

“Yea, well you handled it just right. And it will get easier as you do more,” Muriel said. “So, I'll let you both know when we've got a potential country to perform this wicked act,” she added, grinning. “I'll see you later.” And she and Ted translated back to Enclave.

# Chapter 14

## The Unusual Visitor (Saturday afternoon)

"There you are," Mata said. "Sorry to desert you like that, but I got word that we had an unexpected visitor trying to get over the back fence. I figured you couldn't get into TOO much trouble with Melanie, Taylor and Ted there." She was grinning, just waiting for Muriel to take the bait.

"So, where is he?" asked Muriel.

"Still hanging around on the shield. Bob and I were just about to go get him. Want to come?"

"I'd love to. Let's go," Muriel replied, and they translated to the location.

As they approached, Muriel called Bob back. "Sound baffles, people, and give me a minute. Oh, and somebody put baffles on him, too. I'll be busy," she said, grimly. After a couple of minutes, there was the sign of an explosion around the man that never touched him. After another minute, Muriel signaled that it was all clear.

"So, Bob, how do you want to handle this?" asked Muriel.

"I want to make a cast of his fingers before we release him. It's easier that way. Then I can get good prints off him, and maybe identify him," Bob said. "After that, it's just draw him through the shield, and you can play with him."

"Please," the man said. "Please, don't let them get me?"

"Who?" asked Muriel.

"The Ambassadors. They'll kill me."

"Well, we'll have to see what we can do about that," Muriel said, in her soft voice, smiling. "Of course, a lot will depend on you. I think I can keep them from killing you, but you'll have to help us – tell us all about it, like who you are and why you're here, and who they are, and stuff."

"I'll tell you . . . I'll tell you anything, just don't let them get me," he said.

"OK," Bob said, "I've got the fingerprints. We can get him down, now."

"Gently," said Muriel. "We don't want anything to happen to him. That's it. I've got him . . . he won't fall." Then to the intruder, "There, isn't that better? Now, you just come with

me, and we'll see what we can do for you," and translated him to her office.

"Now, why don't you just sit down, and tell us about yourself," Muriel said.

"Wow! What is this place? You somebody special, or something?" he asked.

"Naw. I'm just a girl. This is like my living room, or something. Where I can relax and watch TV or study. They even gave me a desk to do school work at. They kinda adopted me, when I first came here. They all look out for me, keep me out of trouble, and stuff like that," Muriel said.

::Oh, yea. Keep you out of trouble. Like we could actually do that,:: Mata sent with a mental grin.

::Hush, you. I'm trying to jolly him into giving himself away. I want to hear what kind of lies he'll come up with,:: Muriel sent back.

"So, who are you? And why'd you try to come into Enclave from the back?" Muriel asked.

"Oh, I'm Roger. They made me do it," he said. "They said they'd hurt my family if I didn't do it."

"Well, we'll have to see about that. Why don't you tell me about them, and where I can find them. Maybe we can help your family," Muriel said.

"No! They'll know. If you go anywhere near them, they'll know. They're not nice men. They think that your Ambassador needs to die, because she doesn't believe in Allah. That she's leading people down the wrong path," he said.

"Uh, huh. But lots of people don't believe the way they do," Muriel said.

"They don't care. They're going to make them believe," he said. "They're . . . ."

"Muriel," Ted said, interrupting, "how are power and water doing?"

Roger's eyes widened. "NO! You're her. You're the Ambassador. You said that the Ambassador wouldn't hurt me."

"Sleepy time, Roger. We'll have to do this the easy way," Muriel said, forcing him into sleep.

"Oops. I blew it, didn't I," Ted said.

"Don't worry about it. I don't think we could have gotten anything intelligent out of him just by talking, anyway. The whole thing was a lie," Muriel responded. "But, now that you're here, we can do it the easy way, and you can make a record for analysis to look at. I'm afraid

it'll be a bit messy, though. Stream of consciousness sort of stuff. Oh, and the water situation has changed dramatically since we moved the outlet pipes of the factories to up-stream of the inlet pipes. I don't think they liked the taste," she added.

"Power, on the other hand, is coming along. All major cities have the availability of being covered, and we're working on the smaller towns and outlying areas. That should be completed next week. The grid is working, too, though I still don't think it'll be needed," she said, switching subjects. "Oh, and pollution is down, what with the new cars and trucks that are taking over from the gas powered ones. We need to get those plans over to Chun, so they can clean up Beijing."

"We will. Jeff said he's going to take them over, Monday," Ted said. "So, what's with this one?"

"Oh, he came in over the back fence. Suicide bomber. Had enough explosive attached to him to have blown up this building, if it had been able to be blown up," Muriel said. "He got stuck on the shield, and Bob, Mata and I went out and 'rescued' him. Bob's trying to get information on him."

"Bob's got information on him," Bob said, coming into the casual area. "Not a lot, unfortunately, but enough for a direction, maybe. Roger Robinson, 22, petty thief. Spent a year in prison, and fell in with one of those violent Muslim sects that keep popping up. You know, the ones that twist their holy books into pretzels to show that they should take over the world by violence. He's single, family unknown. On probation and working at a 'legitimate' chop shop run by another bunch of Muslim extremists. Nothing's been pinned on them, yet. At least Homeland has nothing on them, but they're watching them. Looks like a 'throw away' to me. Not high enough in the group or intelligent enough to push his way to the top. They gave him a job that made him feel big and important, and got him out of the way at the same time."

"Then, I guess it's time for me to wake him up and see what he has to say for himself," Muriel said. "OK, Roger, come on back. Just a little. That's it. Tell me about yourself, Roger," she coaxed, and the stream started. From time to time she'd try to turn the stream into a different path, when he started repeating himself. Other than that, though, she just let him talk. Names, places, events began to come out of the mess, beginning to put a structure to the crowd he was involved in. When he finally ran down, Muriel looked at Bob.

"We turn him over to the locals," Bob said. "Clear violation of probation, here, as well as potential for more. They can contact the FBI for further charges. Did you ever get that commissioner trained?"

"Nope. Couldn't make the link. I'd LOVE to know why, but I won't force it, since we're on such good terms. I'll call him to send someone to make the pickup," Muriel said.

"OK. I'll take him back to my place. We've got a nice, padded cell we can put him in. Wouldn't want him to hurt himself when he regains consciousness," Bob said, smiling. "He'll be fine. Feed him up a bit, while we're waiting for transport, and maybe clean him up a bit."

You did a nice job of shielding him from the blast, and in containing it. But it kinda blew up his jacket a bit. We should be able to duplicate the original.”

“Must be nice to be organized,” Muriel said, smiling back. “I’ll leave it to you, then, and see what Ted really wants. It’s never the first thing that comes out of his mouth. He should have a record of that interview for your team.”

“Already got it. See you later,” he said, and he took his prisoner out of her office.

“Well, Ted?”

“I was just wondering how you were doing on getting a country to host the signing,” he said.

“We’ve got some nibbles. I’ve got the three squad leaders out, going from country to country. Two of the nibbles might interest you. Russia is one,” Muriel said.

“Can we trust them?”

“Maybe. I’ll be doing follow-ups starting Monday. The other is Taiwan – the Republic of China.”

“After all the hassle the PRC gave them over the years? Why?” asked Ted.

“Because, believe it or not, they’re interested in the Envoys and what an Enclave is. And they really DO have an interest in Mainland China. It was only the government that they despised. No government, and no problem. They want to make up and be friends,” Muriel replied. “However, I’m not going to put any greater weight on them than I do on the other suggestions. After I’ve talked to everyone, I’ll pass the top possibilities to Chun and the Queen, and let them decide from there. Mostly, I want to see if they have any objections.”

“So, what do you think?”

“I’d pick Taiwan as my first choice and Russia as my second. Those are the two closest that have expressed a possible interest. We’ll have to do the actual hosting, though. Neither of the countries would have time to build the facilities and staff them,” Muriel said. “Which gives us the opportunity to have an American presence there, too. I’m still waiting to hear from Melanie on that.”

“Why those two?”

“Well, to be honest,” Muriel said, “because they were the two that felt most threatened by the PRC, and most wanted to do something about that government. Oh, others felt threatened, too, but not as much as Russia and Taiwan. PRC wanted the riches of the North. Taiwan just wanted to be free, and the PRC wanted desperately to own them. I wish there was a way to get representatives of the two governments to GO to the China Enclave and see what the attitude is, there, now. But even to just have one of them host the treaty signing

would be a sign that they recognized that there had been a change of attitude – that China was no longer the threat it had been.”

“Do you really think it would help?” asked Ted.

“Well, it wouldn't hurt, and MIGHT help,” Muriel replied. “There's another possibility, too, if Melanie can convince the President, and he can convince Congress. That it be a three-way signing. We were the third big target, only China used finances rather than force in that case. I don't know whether you know it or not, but Chun 'forgave' the American national debt to China as one of the first things she did. Same with the other countries, but America's was the largest. They almost succeeded in owning this country, by buying it.”

“Yea, I knew the debt was high. I hadn't heard that Chun had negated it. That's quite something. But what will they do for money, now?”

“What does Enclave do with money?” Muriel retorted. “We don't. We pump it back into the local economy however we can – charities and emergency relief, and such. China will do the same. Chun talked to me about it. They've still got factories producing goods for the West, but now they're operated by Envoy trained people, which means the cost of manufacturing is WAY down. Clothing, toys, stuff like that. Cars and trucks, starting next year, if she can get the specs from Jeff. And I don't see a problem there.”

“Well, I'm sorry I messed up your party with our intruder.”

“You didn't, really,” Muriel smiled. “I was just going to let him run with his lies until he bit his tail, then call him on them, and see which way he wiggled. I really didn't expect to get anything useful from it. So, it was just as well that you interrupted. I'm sorry that I put you through that garbage, though.”

“Oh, that was no problem. Not like our earlier version of doing it the easy way. That was just plain dirty. At least this way we didn't have to experience all the garbage along the way,” Ted said. “Running barefoot through someone's mind, like that . . . well, it's just disgusting what you find. I suppose most people have their dark side, but I'd just as soon not have to see it, unless it's the dark side that's driving their behavior.”

“We have another problem. I thought so, when we went after all those people in corporations, politics, media and religion four years ago,” Muriel said. “But a recent survey has pretty much confirmed it.”

“What's that?”

“The people at the top? For the most part, they're sociopaths. They don't see or can't understand the damage their actions do to society. They're out strictly for themselves. That's contra-survival. Some corporations were actively recruiting them for the top positions, because they made money for the corporation. And, of course, the stock holders loved it. We never really cleaned it up, though. With religion, it was only some of them that operated that way. Many ministers and priests really wanted – and still want – to help people through

their problems. Media was pretty much forced to 'look at the bottom line' all the time, though we've changed that a bit. But politics and businesses . . . uh, uh. Somehow, we've got to find a way to change that. Economics is one way with businesses. Consistently undercut their prices, and either force them out of business or take them over as wholly owned subsidiaries of Triple E. Politics, though. I don't know what to do about that."

"It may not be as much of a problem as you think," Ted said. "Many of the adults that have been trained are working their way up the ladder in politics. Negative ads are becoming the thing of the past, because they were tried against those with Envoy training, and the trained retaliated with facts and figures. Some of those facts demonstrated that the incumbent politicians were dirty in their personal lives as much as they were deceptive and outright lying in their political lives. Now, those sociopaths are becoming afraid to face off against them."

"Oh, and we are buying up businesses," Ted added. "Just as fast as we can. We buy blocks of stock through various cutouts, then, when we have enough, pool it together and out the board and officers go. Pull the company private again, and change the way things are done. It's just a long, slow process. But haven't you seen how the staff at Triple E has increased over the four years? It's triple the size that it was, at least. And we've been aiming at key industries. We even own our own media outlet – movies, television and radio, music, and in a branch that doesn't even know it's happened, book, music manuscripts, and periodicals. How come you don't know about them?"

"The only thing I can think of is that, when you handed them off to Triple E, they just went ahead and implemented what I'd laid out, originally. I knew they'd increased in size, but it never occurred to me to question why, and they never told me. The finks. I'll have to kid Frederica about that. Keeping secrets from me," Muriel said, laughing.



# Chapter 15

First Draft  
(Monday morning)

::Muriel,:: Melanie sent, ::are you available?::

::For you? Almost always,:: she sent back, with a chuckle.

::I've got a first draft of a treaty with China. We stripped out all the America specific stuff, or changed it to reflect a different country instead of an Enclave inside this country. The President would like you to take a look at it::

::No problem. I'm in my office,:: Muriel sent back.

"I'll stick around while you and Ted look it over," Melanie said, as she translated in and handed a package to Muriel. "It's a much slimmer package. Mostly, it just recognizes China as an Enclave, and existing in it's own right. Oh, and as an Embassy, too. The whole thing."

"Well, the advertising sounds good. Now, let's see how real the advertising is," quipped Muriel, and called Ted in to look at it, too.

It took about a half hour for them to go over the document. Very few changes needed to be made, mostly changing wording to make sentences scan better or breaking up run-on sentences. Some thoughts were added to demonstrate that America viewed the making of China into an Enclave to be a positive international move. Before they'd even finished reading and commenting on it, Chun sent her own version of a treaty with Britain. It was interesting to see the similarities between them, but comparing the two, Ted spotted some differences between that and the American version that he felt could be incorporated both ways. None of the changes restricted China's abilities as an Enclave in any way. The modified documents were sent back for further consideration, and Muriel could feel Chun's mental grin when she was told about the changes. Melanie simply took the package back to the President.

Britain hadn't sent a version, but really, it wasn't expected this soon. Parliament was notorious for their inability to get legislation passed quickly. Sure enough, the House of Lords wanted to meet with the 'government' of the nation of China before attempting to create a treaty. Ted just laughed. Muriel contacted Chun, mentally, and explained the situation. Chun was the administrator, but Muriel and Ted were the Leaders of Home, which would be the government. Muriel was all for all three, plus full squads and security chiefs, to just show up and shut the House of Lords down. Ted thought that might be a bit much. Chun just laughed.

Then Taylor arrived, and things got VERY interesting. "The Queen, my grandmother, has suggested that instead of visiting the House of Lords chamber, we use Westminster hall. That way there would be room for you three and your security squads." He placed a piece of

paper on Muriel's desk, showing a representation of the hall as it would be used for such a meeting. Then it was Muriel's turn to laugh."

"The only way for us to get in would be in the air," she said. "She wants this to be outrageous, doesn't she?" Muriel asked Taylor.

"Oh, much worse than just outrageous," he replied, then sketched in his place in this – duplicating the normal guards for the Queen with three squads of his "Jolly Greens". "We'd also have to come in from the air. 'Lances, but no horses, this time. After all, we ARE the Home Regiment, and meant to guard the royal family."

"OK," Muriel said. "Then to match it, we send in our squads to land on the floor and mount the stairs, so they're three down from the Queen. Then, WE come in, above our guards, and stop at the second step."

"Hmm. Protocol would place Chun, and maybe Ted, at least one step below you. Stop the squads four steps down? Ted and Chun on step three, you on step two?" Taylor asked.

"That can be arranged," Muriel replied. "When?"

"Two hours. Since the Lords have called for this meeting, the Queen's going to oblige them. But they must show up in full regalia and as soon as possible. They're supposed to keep it handy for just such a situation, and it's going to drive home that point. They were expecting that it would take weeks or months to set this up because of the distances involved. She wants to show them that diplomacy doesn't have to take forever. This is no longer the eighteenth century, after all."

"You don't leave me much time to come up with a speech," she said.

"Nope. No speech," Taylor said, grinning. "Just say 'hello' to the Queen, then turn around and address the Lords. In a sense, you are more than just the leader of a nation, you are the leader of an entire world. Basically, I think she'd like you to put them in their place. They are only the government of a nation. They are there at YOUR sufferance, rather than the reverse. It isn't that they 'commanded' that you appear before them, but that you were asked to come, and you have interrupted your busy schedule to meet them. Offer nothing. Her Majesty already has a draft – we've seen the American and Chinese versions, with the changes, and she's adopted them. She's going to force it through on the spot."

Melanie showed up at that point and grinned. "I've got it. And it's approved. We've already checked with Chun and the Queen, through Taylor's help, and all three agree. So we're ready to go whenever you are." Muriel explained to her what Taylor had suggested, and she roared with laughter. "OK, that's better than what the President did. He simply sent a note to Congress telling them that if they didn't get their heads out of their butts and approve it that he'd call you in to explain to them why their approval really wasn't necessary. They approved it in fifteen minutes. I think they're afraid of you."

"Yea," Taylor said, "but the Lords haven't had the benefit of such an example. Yet. The

Queen's considering it.”

“OK,” Muriel said, “I’m going to make a suggestion for later, at the signing. Since years ago when I got shanghaied into being THE leader of Home, Ted has taken the place of The Ambassador to America. Taylor is obviously The Ambassador to Britain, and Chun is just as obviously The Ambassador to China. I want all three to be there at the signing. We also need the President and the Queen. The President and Queen can both have witnesses to their signature, as I will have witnesses to my signature, the three 'local' Ambassadors, since I’ll be signing as the Leader of Home. How’s that sound to you?”

“Fine with me,” Taylor said. “And I’ve got Chun in, mentally, and she agrees. With some relief, I might add. She doesn’t mind being an administrator, but balks at being the 'government'.”

“I agree, and so does the President,” Melanie chimed in. “It just seems appropriate and obvious.”

“I see where you’re going, Muriel,” Ted added. “You’re reinforcing that, no matter what the size, the Enclave and Embassy are governed by the Leader of Home, or the successor to that leadership. Should that be written into the treaty?”

“Yes, I think so,” Muriel replied, reflectively. “We need continuity. Obviously, because I’m human, I’ll die sometime. Or I may be replaced by the Envoys – a new leader found. Or any other circumstances that we can’t even envision at this time. But more than that, we’re establishing that a whole country can make the choice to become an Enclave of Home.”

“OUCH! That opens up a whole can of worms,” Ted said. “You’re saying that a government can opt out by transferring to an Enclave all the rights and privileges of the government, and naming the Leader of Home as the new government.”

“Yep. And more, that the PEOPLE of the country can do so, without the government’s permission. Which is exactly what happened here, with China. The government died, and the people chose to acknowledge Chun as the administrator. Or, to put it another way, they chose to follow the leadership of Home that Chun embodied,” Muriel said.

“She’s right, you know,” Taylor said. “Whenever a majority of the people of a country are trained in Envoy techniques, they become a force all their own, even if just a peaceful one. They can, by what ever means available in the country, simply acknowledge that connection to Home and decide that they are an Enclave. And that leaves the culture of the country intact. It does change the social structure, in that whatever the government imposed as structure is no longer in existence.”

“It also provides the people a lot more freedom,” Melanie said. “Without the government imposed structure, people are free to decide for themselves what is right and wrong in keeping with the balance. And the balance, being as basic as it is, is the same for everyone.”

“What is Truth,” Ted said.

“Not quite. More like what is real,” Muriel replied. “There may not actually be something that is Truth with a capital 'T'. But the balance doesn't deal with that. It's a guide for how you find truth in yourself, so it's individualized and subject to circumstances.”

“So, what you're doing is providing a simple way of explaining or defining a very complex situation,” Ted said. “You're relegating truth to something that is based on fact – almost a legal term. You're bypassing the whole discussion that numerous philosophers have tried to tackle over the centuries, by saying that it is not an ultimate, but simply the product of reality.”

“Yep,” said Muriel. “What I see as blue of a particular visual frequency may not be the same as what you see as blue using the same frequency reference. BUT IT DOESN'T MATTER! What matters is that we agree that it is blue. That's circumstance. That's reality for us.”

“Tell me, Muriel,” Taylor said, “does your head ever hurt?”

“Why?” she asked, sweetly. “Is it killing you?”

“Ha, ha,” Taylor replied. “That one is older than you are.”

“Oh, heck,” Muriel said, “it's even older than Ted.” Ted just looked sour, and the others laughed. And then, so did Ted.

Mata came into the casual area and asked Muriel, “Do you realize that this is going to raise a firestorm of protest from other countries?”

“Oh, I expect that we'll be denounced in a number of ways, not just countries,” Muriel replied. “Totalitarian governments will see us as empire building, and imply that we forced people to take the training or to move the government to Home. Others will say that we're destroying capitalism by denying companies the profits that they feel they so richly deserve. Richly deserve, indeed! They've made so much money off of locking up technology and stifling innovation that they 'richly deserve' to be shut down. 'Christian' governments will see us as anti-Christian. Islamic countries will see us as anti-Muslim. Countries that have, for years, denied the existence of a god and reject religions will see us as a religious organization that is trying to foist its beliefs on an unsuspecting population. Democratic countries will see us as being communistic. In short, whatever we do will be seen as the opposite of what the leaders of those countries believe to be true. Even scientists, medical personnel and engineers will say 'it can't be done!' and reject the methods that we use.”

“You're accelerating the movement, again, aren't you?” Ted said.

“Yep. I expect that you might want me to move out, soon, since there'll be such an activity to destroy me that it might get dangerous around here,” Muriel said.

"You wish," Ted said. "Your mother would kill me if let you leave. Don't even THINK about it." And he shuddered.

"Ted? What's wrong?" asked Muriel.

"It's that I'm not kidding. She made it perfectly clear to me that if I let you get hurt, in any way, SHE knew how to kill. And she would," Ted said. "So, you just stay here, and stay covered with as many Envoys as we can group around you."

"Ted, when did she tell you this?"

"About three years ago."

"Ted, my mother isn't going to kill you. Three years ago I was thirteen. That's when the hormones really started kicking in. And, for about three weeks, I had feelings I didn't know what to do with. Then, I figured out how to control it," Muriel said. "Now, I'm afraid I'm going to hurt you. You see, I controlled it by thinking of you as my older brother. MUCH older brother. And it worked. No more crush. And I didn't get hurt."

Ted stood there, staring at her, dumbfounded, his mouth hanging open and lips quivering, slightly. And then he started laughing. A chuckle, a snort, a laugh, and then he roared and tried to find a seat before he fell over. He managed, and didn't even notice that the seat he'd managed to stumble to was Muriel's recliner.

Bart came in and looked at him, then just shook his head. "Bottom," he said.

"What?" asked Muriel.

"Bottom, from Shakespeare, 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'," Bart added. "Ted is Bottom. Or, in other words, he just made an ass of himself. Again," he explained. And Taylor cracked up. That just served to keep Ted going.

"Yes," Muriel said, chuckling. "I can see why you'd say that. But at least this time he had help. My mother knew what I was going through. But obviously, she never told Ted – just expected that he already knew. And he didn't. I was very careful to NOT let him know what I was going through, because I was too embarrassed by it. Oh, dear. Now, I'm afraid that I've hurt him in a way that can't be repaired."

Ted managed to free a hand from his abdomen and wave to indicate a negative. Then retrieved a handkerchief from a 'no pocket' and wiped his streaming eyes. "Not . . . hurt . . .," he managed to say past the laughter. Bart left, then came back with a glass of water and got Ted to drink some, holding it for him as if he were a baby. Finally, the laughter settled down to chuckles, then to him just taking deep breaths. Finally, he was able to sit up unassisted though standing up would still be beyond him for a bit.

"Ted, I'm sorry . . .," Muriel began.

"No," he gasped out. "Not hurt. Just stupid. I never knew. You had a crush on me?"

"Yea, well, for all of three weeks. But a girl can't make intelligent decisions that way, especially when she's working with the person she has a crush on, every day," Muriel said.

"No wonder your mother said she'd kill me if you got hurt. And I never realized that it was because you had a crush on me. Oh, Muriel, I'm sorry. If I'd realized I might have been able to help you."

"No, you couldn't have," she said. "If you'd said anything, or done anything to indicate that you knew, then I WOULD have been hurt – I would have felt foolish and ashamed."

And Bart quietly said, "What fools these mortals be."

"Oh, don't, Bart," Ted said, doubling over his already abused abdomen. "It hurts when I laugh."

"Yes, Bart," Muriel added, "Don't be Puckish. Let the poor man recover. Ted, are you sure you're all right?" Ted just nodded.

"Puckish?" asked Melanie.

"Puck says that line about mortals being fools in the play," Muriel said. "Act three, I think. Puck, otherwise known as Robin Goodfellow, and a bunch of other names. I always loved that play. Shakespeare had as much a love of puns as I do. And 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' was definitely a play on words. I should have realized what Bart was saying, when he used the name 'Bottom'. That's the name of the character in the play that is turned into a donkey with whom the Queen of the Fairies falls in love. WAIT A MINUTE! Bartholomew, are you trying to call me the Queen of the Fairies?" The corners of Bart's mouth quivered as he tried to keep from smiling. And Muriel hit him. Ted fell off the chair and curled up on the floor, once more consumed with laughter.

Mata walked over to Ted and laid a hand on his shoulder. "It's OK, Ted, just relax. Let it wash through you. That's it. No, lay still, and I'll fix the abused muscles. Steady up. That's it. Feeling better, now?"

"Oh, my. Yes, thanks Mata. Oh, gad. I should have realized. You were at that age, and I knew you were going through that firestorm of hormonal emotions. But we were also so busy that it never occurred to me," Ted said, calmed down, now, and able to stand up again. "Then I took what your mother said in completely the wrong way. I thought she was referring to the problems we were going through, and the number of times you'd been attacked. Oh, my. Yep. Definitely a fool."

"Well, not entirely. I tried very hard to keep it from you – not making decisions while you were around, for example, and not looking at you too much," Muriel said. "And the crying. I think that's what I remember the most. Not knowing what was going on, and feeling frustrated, and crying. But mom set me straight on what was happening, and I figured if I

could see you as something that was NOT attractive to me, like an older brother, that I could pull out of it. And I did. And I was able to get back to work, normally.”

“You are one remarkable girl, Muriel,” Ted said.

“Naw, just a hungry one. Do we have time to grab a bite before we go?” she asked.

“Yes,” said Mata. “Sit,” she added, pointing to Muriel’s chair.

Muriel put her hands up, like the paws of a begging dog. “Rrrf,” she barked, then panted like an excited dog, eager to please.

Mata hit her.

# Chapter 16

## Confrontation

(Monday afternoon)

Muriel followed her squad over the heads of the assembled nobility, making her pace into an absolute swagger. The way she walked seemed to say that she owned this place, and the Queen acknowledged her effort with a raised eyebrow. Taylor had come in, with his squads, behind the Queen. Chun and her squads were on her left, and Ted and his squads on her right. Mata had kept Muriel's squads lower on the stairs, to allow Muriel to come directly to the stair she would briefly occupy.

"Hello, Your Majesty," she sang out, as she touched the step, and the Queen fought to suppress a grin at the young girl's outlandishness. "I hope I didn't keep you waiting."

"Not at all, Muriel," the Queen said. "We appreciate your coming here."

"And are these the doddering old fools that thought it appropriate to 'summon' the Leader of a world, like she was some naughty schoolgirl?" asked Muriel, pointing over her shoulder with her thumb.

"Ah, yes, that's the House of Lords," the Queen said.

"Oh, very good. Then I'll just have a little talk with them." Muriel turned around and faced the nobility. "So," she said, projecting her quiet voice through shields, "who was the idiot that was so self-important that he felt he could disturb the Leader of a world and cause her to set aside her busy schedule in order to speak to him? Well? Come, people. I am here. And I am Muriel, the Leader of Home. I've come, granting your ill-worded request to converse with me. What? No one wants to talk, now? Then it must be that you already approve the treaty as it's been proposed, and I can go back to more important work."

"Just a moment, young lady," a voice rang out from the front of the assembled crowd. "You have no right to speak to us like that!"

"Really? Well, in case you missed it, I just did. Who are you?"

"I'm the Prime Minister, and I demand . . ."

"You demand nothing of me. You are not my sovereign. You are not my leader, in any way, shape, or manner. You are merely a piss-ant little fop that has attempted to use bullying tactics on your betters. GET UP HERE!" she said, and grabbed the man in shields and drew him into the air, kicking and sputtering. "Now, you can explain to me why you felt that you just HAD to see me. And no bluster about how I'm the supplicant, or how I'm not showing you the proper respect. I am NOT the supplicant. And I'm showing you as much respect as you deserve – you and this body of overweight, self-important jerks. You show me respect and I'll



show it to you. Not some artificial formalities, but real respect for my position and my title. And, more importantly, for me as a person. Now, answer the question. Why do you think you have anything to discuss in what is essentially just an acknowledgment of the fact that the area of this planet that you call China has changed its government?"

"But, it's one sided!" he exclaimed. "It offers us nothing!"

"Yes, and you offer IT nothing. They do not seek your permission to change their government. No such permission is needed, and the deed is already done. They do not seek trade through this treaty. They simply expect you to acknowledge that they have a border, and that you will respect it, and its people."

"But, this is so highly irregular! You're turning the whole country into an Enclave. Not only that, but into an Embassy. Unheard of!"

"Perhaps unusual," Muriel said. "But not something that I did. It is the People of China that have decided that they no longer want the form of government that they had, nor any other form that exists on earth. So, why shouldn't they have the form that they want? And remember, you really have no choice in the matter. All this was explained to you. You're simply holding out as a means of attempting to bully people into giving you something that you have not earned. Sorry, mister, but that doesn't work. And it's a good thing that it's me that you're dealing with and not Ambassador Chun. The last person that tried to bully her is now dead. Of course, I could do something like that, myself, but you haven't attempted to shoot me . . . yet."

Muriel's eyes began to glow black, and her body glowed white. "Now, pipsqueak, do you REALLY want to try bullying tactics on me? I CAN out bully you, you know. And I'm getting tired of your stupidity. You face something that you cannot understand, so you try to control it. This isn't the seventeenth century, where a lord's whim is law. Now, you're expected to be intelligent enough to meet new situations and deal with them honestly. If you can't do that, then maybe you should resign."

"Now see here! I'm the Prime Minister . . . ."

"Yes. One step down from the leader of your country. And I'm the leader of a whole world. Your leadership, such as it is, is vested in you by 'constituents' that you've lied to, bragged to, and in general confused. Whereas mine was bestowed on me without my campaigning for it – in fact without even my knowledge or approval. I was simply told, one day, that I was the Leader, and had been for some time. Why? Because I'm going in a direction that the People of Home approve. I'm doing something. And they're following me because they feel it's the right way. They could revoke that Leadership at any time, and I wouldn't have any say in the matter. But you – what have you done for your country. How many people actually feel that you're doing a good job, and know what's going on? I could tell you. I have the results of the polls, here," she said, reaching into a 'no pocket' and pulling out a piece of paper. "But I'm sure you already know. I have another set of papers that shows that YOU were one of the ones that encouraged the 'land grab' of China, and attempted to have the treaty you hold with Prince Taylor put aside. How'd that work out for you? Not well.

We discovered who the active participants were, and gave them a show that caused them to wet their pants. And they're now in jail. Perhaps you should be, too."

"This is outrageous . . . ."

"Of course it is. I'm known as the Outrageous Ambassador to Earth. Didn't you know that?" asked Muriel. "And why am I considered that? Because I don't fall for the formal bull that you think is so important. I respect people as they respect me. I don't pretend that I'm somebody important, because I'm not. Remember? I can be replaced at any time, and without notice. I'm just a girl doing a dirty job, because so much of it involves politics or 'good old boy -ism'. Now, you have a job to do. Or I will encourage Her Majesty to prefer charges of treason against you for your hand in attempting to break the treaty your country has with Home. I expect you to LEAD your people into understanding why this is simply an acknowledgment of the reality of China, or come up with VALID reasons why there need to be changes. You have fifteen minutes," she said, and put him back on the ground.

"Your Majesty . . . !"

"Mister Prime Minister, I suggest you do what Muriel suggests. And she did suggest, not order, believe it or not. She gave you an option. And a time limit. Muriel," the Queen went on, "Could I have that information about his treason, please?"

"Mata, would you be so kind?" Muriel said.

"Of course, Madam Ambassador," Mata said.

"Forgive her, Your Majesty. She gets like that sometimes. Especially if she thinks I may have come on too strong," Muriel said. "But I know how to get back at her, don't I, my ever faithful and obedient Security Chief." And the Queen laughed.

"This is interesting information, Muriel," the Queen said, as she read the pages. "How did you manage to get it?"

"Oh, this is just a short synopsis. The full account is available, if you want it. The methods we use probably aren't in accordance with your laws, since we use methods that even the FBI, CIA, and NSA aren't allowed to use. But, when we're the ones affected, or are under contract to supply information and aid, we dig. Hard. You'd be amazed at some of the stuff we've unearthed," Muriel said. "And 'unearthed' IS the proper term, since much of it is like turning over a rock and watching all the creepy crawlies wiggle out."

"How are your methods different from ours, or perhaps those of America, since you're probably more familiar with them," asked the Queen.

"Basically, we're not hamstrung by the court system and legislation," Muriel said. "Remember, Enclaves are the property of Home and governed under Home's laws. So we can go in and follow a financial chain and determine sources easier than the alphabet groups can. Same with emails, phone calls, and Internet services such as web pages and social

networking. We also have a great analysis section and MUCH faster and more powerful computers than the government. There are still ways to dodge the connections, like using face to face human interaction, but if we determine that something like that has been done, we can roll up whatever group it is to that point, and get the human connection to go the rest of the way."

"Is that what you did, four years ago, when you were attacked by that South American country?"

"Exactly, only more aggressively," Muriel replied. "Since they had attacked home, directly, we didn't feel that we had to be particularly nice about the way we did things. We got the one that gave the bombers their orders from the pilots. He gave us the financial link and some names. Some of those names, in fact most of them, were in the United States, and ALL of the financial links were there. So we split it up into two streams. Ted took the United States, and I went South. And we rolled them all up and held them for the Federal authorities. We could have dealt with them, ourselves, but felt it was more expedient to make the charges through the national courts."

"Just how do you get people to talk?" asked the Queen.

"We don't. We force a one way mental link and pull it out. Or we did. That's a VERY dirty process," Muriel said. "Lately, we've developed a way to get the information verbally by using the forced link only to knock out the person, then use keywords to get the person to talk. Unlike hypnotics and drugs, the person isn't in a suggestible state, so we aren't affecting the information. The information you've got the synopsis of was all gotten by ground work. Following financial trails, emails, social networking, web pages, and connections to people by who he called for instructions. Your PM was actually on the fringes of the group, and was being told what to do by others that you've already got jailed and charged."

"So, why did you leave him out of that group?" the Queen asked.

"Because he was actually small fry and not a decision maker," said Muriel. "What I did here, today, was let him know on no uncertain terms that he could no longer count on getting orders from his handlers. So, now we'll see if he can actually do his job. If he can, you have the options of firing him and getting someone else, or keeping him on, but on a very short leash. If he can't do his job, then you've run out of options. And it looks like we may have an answer."

"Muriel, I begin to see why Home follows you. You're aggressive in how you do things, but you think. You look for links between things that might affect what's going on, and you look at how humans do things. You're also blindingly honest, and that's almost scary. And you think about who is going to be harmed by an action that you take, and try to limit that harm. And all with a speed that leaves me breathless," the Queen said.

"Yes ma'am! That's the actions of the Balance, that we talk about," Muriel said. "So, let's see what your Prime Minister has to say."

"Your Majesty," the Prime Minister said, having resumed his place in the crowd, "the majority of the House of Lords accepts this treaty. There are some questions left, that the treaty specifically does NOT address, such as trade. However, the treaty does say that they will be handled by legislation rather than by treaty. There is a small minority which opposes the treaty on the grounds that it is not being presented by any known or recognized government."

"Thank you, Mister Prime Minister," the Queen replied.

"Now, Your Majesty, if you will excuse me, I will resign my position and my seat in the House of Lords effective immediately," he said.

"Mister Prime Minister, please wait a minute," Muriel said. "I'd like to know why you made such a decision."

The man gave Muriel a very dirty look, then addressed the Queen. "Your Majesty, I feel that it is inappropriate for this country to be ruled by an outside entity. We have seen, here, just how that rule is imposed, with this . . . woman . . . ORDERING us to perform a function."

The Queen's eyebrows went up, then she said, "Sir, this country is NOT ruled by an outside entity, as you choose to call it. I want you to recall that Ambassador Muriel was invited here to speak by you and the House of Lords, not by me. Nor did she force her way in or order that we present ourselves to her. And speak she did. Outlining exactly what the treaty meant, and what rights we, as a country, could honestly exercise concerning another country, and WHY those were the only rights we could exercise. We can choose to acknowledge the existence of the Enclave of China and the form of government that it has chosen, or we can decide to not treat with them at all. Those are our choices. We cannot dictate to another country how it will be run or who will rule."

"You, in your behavior toward the nation known as Home, have acted abysmally," she added. "You attempted to summon her as if you were a court of law about to pass judgment on her. And she rebuffed that attempt. That it was a bit harsh simply shows that she found your behavior, and that of the House of Lords as a whole, to be reprehensible and uncivilized. Perhaps it is well that you decide to leave. But that is YOUR decision. This country will go on, attempting to treat others and other countries with honor and respect, whether you stay or go."

"I know Muriel," the Queen added. "I know that she is offering you the opportunity to learn and change, and grow. That is much more than I would be inclined to do with someone that treated with those that chose to commit treason. But that is the way she is. She does not judge you. She allows you to judge yourself, by your thoughts and actions. And she believes in giving people a chance to correct past mistakes and learn from them, unless the severity of those mistakes is such that legal or terminal action MUST be taken."

"I will take such action as I feel is necessary, in the spirit of what this exceptional girl has provided. If you choose to stay and correct yourself and the situation you were part of,

then I will feel that you can be redeemed. If, however, you persist in your decision to leave, I will be forced to consider that you side with the traitors and would, therefore, constitute a possible harm to this country, culture and society. In which case I would feel that I would have to take legal action against you and group you with those already charged with treason," she concluded. "Do you understand? The decision is up to you."

"Your Majesty, before he answers, allow me to offer another option," Muriel said. "If he wishes and you allow it, he can come with me to the American Embassy as our Guest. He would be provided with food, clothing, shelter, medical attention as needed – all free, of course – and the opportunity to see how an Enclave is actually run. Yes, he'd be under guard – about the equivalent of a very loose house arrest, in that he wouldn't be able to leave the Enclave except to visit other enclaves, also under guard. The guard, by the way, would be for his own protection as much as to keep him from escaping. And the only reason to keep him from escaping is that, while under my protection, he would not be subject to any action that you might take. That little codicil is simply to allow him the opportunity to learn and grow, and determine who or what he might have harmed and how he can rectify it. If he 'informally' left that protection, though, then the decision would be up to you. Oh, one other thing, that guard would be in the form of servants, caring for his needs and seeing to his well being. And they'd be friendly. They would not be police or prison guards. I offer this as a suggestion, only. Either one of you can veto it."

"That is a very generous offer, Muriel," the Queen said. "Why?"

"Hunch. I don't know that he can change. But I'd like to give him the chance. I really don't know, Your Majesty. But I've had this same sort of hunch a couple of times in the past and they both worked out."

"Mister Prime Minister?" asked the Queen.

"What's the use? You've already said that you're going to prosecute me for treason."

"I said that was a possibility, sir. One I would explore if you simply decided to drop out. Going with Muriel and learning what Enclaves are all about is not dropping out. Oh, you'd lose your position, and your seat – at least for the time being. But in the three and a half or four years I've known her I've never known her to be wrong. There is a good possibility that you would come back and resume your seat. Who knows, there's even the possibility of you regaining your position," the Queen said. "But that's up to you."

"Oh, very well, I'll go with her, for whatever it's worth," he replied.

"Then, with your permission, Your Majesty, we'll be on our way."

"Muriel, you've NEVER needed my permission. Be off with you, scamp. I'll see you soon enough, at the signing. Do you know where, yet?"

"Not yet, Your Majesty. We have a couple of possibilities, but I'll have to talk to them both, and see who really wants it, then get a crew in for construction."

“Don't make it too long. I have a feeling that Chun would like to get this over with as soon as possible.”

“I know,” Muriel replied. “Actually, so would I. I imagine the rest can simply be done in her office. But this first batch is important. Well, sir, time to go. We'll get you set up with a room in our Guest House, and have someone in to see about clothes for you.” Muriel and the Prime Minister translated out.

# Chapter 17

## A New Start

(Tuesday morning)

“Well, Mister Prime Minister . . . oh, I can't keep calling you that, I'd be worn out by the end of the day. What IS your name?” Muriel asked.

“Philip . . . Philip Heseltine. No relation, that I know of,” he replied.

“Relation?”

“Oh, there were a lot of Heseltines. One, named Philip, was a composer among other things. Early twentieth century. Wrote music under the name Peter Warlock,” he added.

“OH! I know some of his work. Very good composer. Very tragic life. Well, Philip, I'm just Muriel, as you noticed with the Queen. So, how was your evening?”

“Good. I had no idea that America could produce meals that were so British. And those guards of mine. More like ubiquitous servants. They're there, but they're not there. Every time I need one, at least one will be there ready to take my orders. Otherwise, they just seem to disappear.”

“Yea, they're good at that. And Guest House has a very good chef. There have been a couple of times when I've gone there just for the meals. He's human, hired away from a restaurant in New York City. He came out for a vacation, and the manager hired him on the spot. Spends most of his time grinning, now,” Muriel rambled on. “Your guards, by the way are Envoys, and just as good at what they do. There's been a couple of times when I've used them for special Guests. Feel free to talk to them about anything that you might not understand about Enclave or Envoys. Or anything at all, really. They can be servants, but they can also be friends. They use the 'servant' formality simply to help people feel more at ease. So, how are the clothes?”

“I can't believe them. So comfortable. No binding or chafing. Shoes that actually fit. Like everything was designed and tailored specifically to me.”

“They were. Again, I've used that couple a number of times with guests. They really enjoy their work,” Muriel continued rambling. “In case you didn't catch it all, yesterday evening, there is no cost to you for any of this. Enclave pays for it because you are our Guest. Well, actually, there isn't any cost to us, either. Enclaves and Home don't operate on a cash economy. It isn't really communism, either, though it is cooperation.”

“The Enclaves DO have some cash transactions . . . oh, nothing that will affect you at all,” Muriel continued rambling even more. It served a purpose. “Visitors – people that just come to see what Enclave is like – tourists, if you will, DO pay for things. They expect to. So

we keep the prices low for them. And there are jobs we do outside of Enclave that bring in money. Building roads and buildings, for example. Or the spy stuff we do for the governments, and yes, it's not limited to just the American government, though that's where it started."

"But, this isn't why you brought me here. This . . . talking about Enclave," Philip said.

"Nope. You'll get to see what a Leader of Home does in real life," Muriel said. "As well as get to interact with other humans and Envoys," Muriel said. "You'll also learn about the balance . . . just what it is and how it works. You know what a conscience is, of course. In a sense, that's a part of the balance. Balance, judgment, conscience . . . they're all part of the same thing. Basically, everyone makes mistakes, does things they know are wrong. It's all part of being human. Conscience acts as a little nag, for those that listen to it, to tell you that there's something you need to do to rectify a situation or heal a hurt you've done someone. Oh, it goes further than that, too, if you listen close. But that's what most people know about it. Balance is the act of making the necessary changes, healing the hurts, correcting the problems in life."

"Judgment, however," Muriel went on, "well . . . everyone goes through it, at least once. Oh, not Envoys. I should have been more specific. Every human goes through it. It's the sudden release of all those nagging things your conscience has been telling you over the years. Judgment, for most people, results from dying and the soul landing on judgment square in Home. Being there triggers something in the human brain. Some people experience it without dying, as the last phase of the Envoy training – going to Home and returning under one's own power and by one's own choice."

"You talk like you've experienced it," Philip said.

"Well, actually I have. Many times. I have friends in Home that I visit from time to time. And every time I go there, I go through it again. I'm human, Philip. I have a mother and father, and a real body. Gad, I sound like Pinocchio. The first time I went to Home was when I was twelve, at the end of my training."

"So, why are you telling me all this?"

"To give you a chance," Muriel said. "Since the judgment hits all humans, sometime, it pays to be aware of what that judgment is, and how to make it easier on yourself. You see, the judgment is triggered by judgment square, but the actual judgment is done by yourself. The purpose of the judgment is to give a human a realization of how out of balance he or she has become. Some human souls can't take the realization of what they've done in life, and suicide – the soul, itself, dies. That's because they have no way of rectifying what they've done. I'd rather see people have the opportunity to make the changes in life, rectify the wrongs, so that doesn't happen to them. That's what I'm offering you. The chance to do your own self-examination and right the wrongs in your life, as much as possible."

"No, I'm not trying to convert you to something," Muriel added. "Not really. Just help you to . . . ."



"Muriel," Bob said, bouncing and grinning into her office, "we got results and you're not going to believe it! Oh, pardon me," he said, noticing Philip. "I didn't mean to interrupt."

"No, it's OK, Bob," Muriel replied. "That was about talked out for now. So, what did you find?"

"Well, to start, his name really is Roger Robinson. But he's not a terrorist. And his family is in danger. I recommend that we do a stealth retrieval of them as soon as possible. My boys can affect it, with no problem, if you like. It's WHAT Roger is that's going to make you flip."

"Oh?"

"He's FBI," Bob said. "He's been working under cover, and got caught up in this mess that started when the Pope decided to try to silence you. The Curia managed to back trace him and find his family. And, when you 'spanked' them and the Pope for their behavior, they picked them up and used them to get him to come here. He was supposed to deliver the bomb and return – or that's what they told him. Instead, they locked it onto him and rigged it to explode taking him with it, so it would look like some terrorist group did it."

"So, why did he feel that Ted or I would want to kill him?"

"Because of who sent him. He figured you and Ted were behind the undercover job, and would feel that he failed. Now, all he wants is to get his family out, safely," Bob replied. "It was Secret Service that requested the FBI to send in a non-trained person. Specifically, it was Melanie. She vetted him, to be sure he was as clean as possible, briefed him on what she wanted him to do, then turned him loose to do it. That's why he thought you and Ted were behind it, and would 'kill' him for muffing the assignment. He knows that Melanie's trained, and that you trained her."

"Crap!" Muriel said, then looked around. "Well, what do you know! I think my mother just turned me loose, too," she said with a laugh. "No soap! OK, Bob, how'd you get the information?"

"Direct link. I had one of my boys feed him power so he wouldn't end up with a massive headache from it. It was Roger's suggestion. That's how Melanie vetted him, and yes, he was a volunteer."

"OK, no offense, Bob, but I'm going to back check this story. Hold on," Muriel said. Then she said and sent to Melanie, "Melanie, I need some information on an operation you ran. Are you free to talk?"

"Shit! It blew up, didn't it. Hold on," she replied, and translated in. "Where is he?"

"In my lock-up," Bob replied. "One of my boys is with him, just talking and chatting sort of stuff, keeping him company and trying to settle him down."

"Melanie, before you see him, we need to get his family. The Curia got them. Bob, any idea where they took them?"

"Rome. We traced them, and they're on a plane headed for the Vatican."

"Mata?"

"Already sent. We've located the plane, it's a business type jet. Two civilians, and six priests," Mata said.

"Melanie, do you have about ten people available to stop the plane and bring it here, while intercepting the priests and getting the civilians out?" Muriel asked.

"I . . . YES! I see the plane. It'll be tight putting it on your back lot. Better warn maintenance to keep people off the track, because that's where we'll pancake it. My troops are ready to take it, whenever you give the signal. We'll just translate the civilians out before we stop the plane and pancake it. Bring them here?"

"Yea, I think that would be best. Bob, you might want to have someone bring Roger over. They're apt to be a bit shook up, and need some reassurance. Come to think of it, Roger probably does, too," Muriel said. "Melanie, I need a request."

"You got it. Muriel, on behalf of the United States government, I request . . . ."

"OK, pull the trigger," Muriel interrupted.

A second later, Roger was in her office, followed quickly by two adults and two Secret Service officers. Roger immediately went to his parents, and a very confused conversation ensued. Muriel let it go on for a minute before interrupting.

"Excuse me," she said. "I think I can clear up a lot, if you'll let me. To start with, you're safe, and back in America. Where are you? In my office. You're in Arizona. So, who am I? My name is Muriel, and Officer Carter, of the Secret Service requested my help in rescuing you. Roger, you are NOT in trouble. The people that sent you are. The people that abducted your parents and tried to take them out of the country are. But NOT you. OK? Feel better, now?" Philip just looked from one person to another, his eyes wide, then stared at Muriel.

"Mister and Missus Robinson, I apologize for you being caught up in this mess. You're safe, and you are our guests until we can be sure that it won't happen again. Melanie, why don't you have your people take them all over to the Guest House. They've got staff that can help them settle down, and will protect them. Later on, perhaps they'd like to come back and meet me under better circumstances."

As they were led out, Mister Robinson said, "Who was that?"

"That was Muriel," his son said. "Ambassador Muriel, the Leader of Home. We're in

the American Enclave. And I think I'm going to have to get Officer Carter's permission before I can tell you much more."

"No you aren't," said a Secret Service officer. "You've got permission. They need to know, and you need to tell them. So, feel free. If anyone objects, I'll take the heat."

"Philip," Muriel said, "things could get messy. Melanie's people are bringing in the priests and flight crew. And the priests are going to be grilled, unmercifully. I'm probably going to trigger the judgment on them. You're welcome to stay, but if I have to play that card it would trigger the judgment in you, too. And I'm not sure that you're strong enough for it, yet. If I have to do that, I'll give you warning so you can go back to the Guest House, or wherever until it's over."

"I'm staying. I've never seen anything like this. You get things done in moments that would have taken us weeks to set up. It's as if everyone knows what you want done, and what their part is in it. And I have NO idea how you manage that. If it means that I must go through the judgment you talk about, then I'll just have to do it. Maybe I can learn from it. Who ARE you? One time you're being flippant and outrageous. The next, you're ripping me apart. Then you're gentle and kind to me. Then you're acting like a top commander in a war."

"They're ALL me," Muriel said. "People aren't two dimensional. They aren't always one person. There are many sides to their personality, and you've seen some of them. The usual 'me' is what you saw when I brought you to Enclave, and what you saw this morning before this blew up. I don't act a part that I have to think about. I'm just me, reacting to situations as they come up, in whatever way they need to be dealt with."

"I'm definitely staying, then. I'll risk whatever judgment I get."

"So be it. I'll . . .," Muriel began.

"I'll take him, Muriel," Caleb said, as he entered. "Besides, I have the most experience. I'll need someone to buffer him, because I'll have to do it mentally. Hello, Philip. I'm Caleb. I'm an Envoy, and I used to head the Guides of Home – the ones that meet the souls of humans that have died – and help them through the process of judgment." Caleb had walked over to the man, and knelt down so they were relatively on the same level. "I'd like to help you though it, if you'll let me. Especially since you'll have the opportunity to come back and do something about what you've learned about yourself and the Balance."

"I . . .," Philip looked at Muriel. She nodded, and he looked back at Caleb. "Why?"

"Why not? Judgment can be tough on an adult. But there are things you can do to temper that. Knowing what you can change and what you can't is part of it," Caleb said. "But you won't realize that while you're going through it, if you're alone. With a guide to help you sort things out, it's easier on you, and you can come out of it in better shape – better able to take advantage of what the judgment offers," Caleb grinned. "Besides," he said, "I like helping people."

"I . . . if you will help me, I'd appreciate it, sir," Philip said.

"OK, then. Muriel, I think we'll need to use your break room for this. And any other humans should be excluded from it. Can we use your squads to help buffer them and keep them from suiciding?" asked Caleb.

"Of course. And good suggestion. There, we can secure them to the chairs so they don't get hurt. Melanie, is that all right with you?"

"Oh, sure. The highest charge is their attempted murder of you and Roger. And that was to happen on Enclave grounds, so you get first crack at them," Melanie replied. "THEN, we'll get them on the abduction and various other charges," she added, with a grin.

The mass of priests and flight crew were ushered in, hot, dusty, exhausted and, in some cases, sunburned. "We brought them by the scenic route," one of the officers said, with a very unkind smile. "We wanted them to have an opportunity to experience Enclave and real life."

They were led, in single file, to the break room where Muriel's squad members took over finding them seats, and separating them. Envoys sat next to each priest and flight crew member. In the front row, facing Muriel, were Philip and Caleb and, of all people, Mata.

"Well," Muriel said, "I'm sure you're wondering why you're all here, instead of in Rome. Simple. You did three things wrong. You priests abducted a family in order to get a man to carry out your orders. Then you tricked the man in such a way that his following your orders would have killed him. Which brings me to the third point. You tried to kill me, and used that man as an unwilling suicide bomber to do it. So, who am I? Muriel, the Leader of Home."

"I know why you did it," she said, matter-of-factly. "Nor are you the first to have tried. For four years people have tried to kill me, because they thought it would solve all their problems. Guess what, people – I'm still here. I'm still very much alive, and still very much in charge. Oh, and I've trained others to be the same way. So, taking me out wouldn't solve your problems, they'd simply shift them to someone you don't know. As for those that tried to kill me, some are dead, some are in prison for the rest of their lives, and some are wandering through the rest of their lives, lost and alone, because they can't come to grips with the truth about themselves. Some few – very few – have actually learned from their mistakes, and are living productive lives, now."

"You won't be given that option. I am tired of religiosities trying to do away with me, one way or another. Your Pope tried it. The strain of dealing with me and seeing a sword thrust through his throne by what looked like an angel was too much for him, and he died. The throne he sat on is useless, can't be moved or sat on, and a warning is posted over it. I'm sure you've seen it. I KNOW you heard it. No, you won't have the option of suicide. You will go to prison, even you in the flight crew, for your parts in this abomination you've created. But before that, it's my turn. Oh, I won't punish you. You'll do that, yourselves. I'll just provide the trigger that will unleash that punishment."

“You have done things in your lives,” she continued, “that you are ashamed of. Things that you’ve excused on one rationality or another. But you knew they were wrong. And you did them, anyway. Well, you’ll get to experience them all over again, and know that they were wrong. Some of them you can correct in one way or another. Apologies, money, actions, whatever means works. Others, you will not be able to rectify, and those will nag at you, gnaw at your mind, and remind you that you have spent your lives foolishly. And that will follow you to your death. The only forgiveness that you’ll get is what you can give yourselves.”

“In addition, a record will be released to the media demonstrating just what your religion is like – what you have attempted to do. It will probably mean the end of your religion. So be it. You’ve brought it on yourselves. Now,” she concluded, “the people sitting next to you are Envoys – the People of Home. They are not human. They are bodiless souls – protectors – nurturers. They are here to keep you from suiciding, and to help you through the judgment process. It will take about fifteen minutes, from what we know about it. But it will seem like much longer to you. When the process is finished, you will be taken by the US Secret Service and FBI to be charged and confined. They’ll explain the various charges to you, and your legal options and rights. And, may you have mercy on yourselves.”

With the conclusion of her words, she drew the image of Judgment Square down around them. And they screamed. They cried. They tried to break free, but they couldn’t break free of themselves. They suddenly knew the wrongs they’d committed and not tried to rectify. They saw the rationalizations for what they were – lying to themselves to attempt to salve their feelings about what they’d done.

In the front row, facing her, sat Philip – grim faced and determined. He almost looked like he was taking notes. He didn’t scream. But he did cry. Cry without shame for his crying. Cry WITH shame for the actions he’d performed that had hurt others. Sometimes resignation crossed his face. At other times, hope. And at others, despair. But he remained silent, locked in the struggle with himself, and facing who and what he was in a way he’d never imagined before. And Muriel wept for the struggle he was going through.

And Muriel went through her own, much shorter, struggle, paying the price of the action she’d just taken. When all had finished, and Philip was the last, Muriel dropped the curtain and shields between the seats and the rest of the office. Then the priests and flight crew were gathered up by the Secret Service officers and translated out, to face their charges in Federal court.

# Chapter 18

## Changing Direction

(Tuesday morning, later)

Philip was busy writing as the last of the abduction people left and Melanie came over to her. "Are you all right?" she asked.

"Huh? Oh, yes. Of course. You realize that I go through that, every time, too, don't you?" Muriel replied.

"Yea, I kinda got that," Melanie said. "That's why I asked. It seemed to hit you harder, this time, though."

"That's because of Philip. I didn't mean for him to go through this, yet. I wanted to give him a chance to do a self-examination, first."

"Well, he seems to have weathered it. What's he writing?" Melanie asked.

"I have NO idea. Just, suddenly, Mata handed him a pad of paper and a pen, and he started furiously writing. She and Caleb don't seem concerned, though," Muriel added.

Suddenly, he stopped writing and sat back. Mata handed him a tissue, and he blotted his eyes, and took a deep breath. Then looked up at Muriel. "Thank you," he said. "Most of these I can do something about. It'll shock some people, and disturb others. But that's their problem. There's only one that I can't do anything about. A girl. I was just out of college, and we met in London. And I lied to her. I used an assumed name . . ."

"Peter Warlock," Muriel said.

"What? How'd you know?"

"Oh, come now, Philip. Really? You told me. Philip Heseltine? I grew up listening to the 'Capriol Suite. For you to be named for him, whether by design or by accident, it was obvious that you'd choose that as a name to go by, after you'd reminded me of who he was," Muriel said.

"I didn't think any but a few oddballs would listen to that kind of music," he replied, in shock.

"Well, that's me all over," Muriel smiled. "A REALLY oddball."

"Well, anyway, we had a fight. I felt that people should be forced to certain behavior, and she didn't. I wish I could go back and apologize to her. But I don't even know how to find her."

"We might be able to help you, there, if she's still alive," Muriel said. "We have some pretty good resources for finding people."

"Muriel," a very recognizable voice called out, and Muriel saw her mother walk in. "Are we still on for lunch? Hi, Philip."

"Hi, mom. Yep, I'm free," Muriel said.

"Lily?" Philip said.

"Or do you still prefer Peter?" her mother replied, cheerfully.

"Wait . . . you're her MOTHER?" he asked, incredulously.

"Of course," Lily replied. "And this is Fred, my husband and her father. Fred, this is Philip Heseltine. You remember me telling you about him."

"Oh, yes! Glad to meet you, Philip," he said, going over and shaking the man's hand. "Hmm. Rough judgment? Well, come on, we know how to fix that up. Some good food, good company. Maybe a rest. That is, if you'll join us. I'm sure Muriel won't mind, will you, dear?"

"Nope. No problem. And mother, you've been keeping secrets from me. A secret lover, and you never told me?" Muriel said, teasingly, to the accompaniment of a minor explosion from Mata who, fortunately, was NOT drinking anything at the time.

"Oh, nothing like that," Lily said, airily. "Merely a friendship and a disagreement. Oh, it might have gone further, but we DID disagree, and I was due to leave England, so we broke it off. To tell you the truth, I think Philip was a bit relieved. I was a bit too radical for him. Nothing like the secrets you've been keeping, dear."

"ME! When have I had a chance. Aside from my work, I'm always chaperoned by at least one Envoy, and often several. And when I DO meet a boy I'd like to get to know better, there's a rash of them, standing around me and grinning. They're not stopping me, by the way, they're just grinning because they want to see what happens next!" Muriel said, in disgust. Mata, by this time was bent over, holding her stomach, and Ted was trying hard not to laugh, and turning red with the effort.

"Well, dear, there was that nice boy you met, way back when. I notice that he keeps coming around, trying to show off to impress you," her mother said, casually.

"Taylor? He's a PRINCE, mother," Muriel replied. Out of the corner of her eye, she caught Philip staring at first her, then her mother, his mouth describing a perfect 'O', and his eyes wide. "He's heir to the throne. I'd stand about as much chance with him as I would with Ted. Besides, I met him when I was twelve. I'm long since over any feelings beside friendship that I might have had. And he's as busy as I am, what with training his regiment

and everything.”

“Yes, well, I notice that he was over here, recently, exercising his testosterone with a bunch of his regiment,” Lily said casually. Now, Ted had managed to find his way to a recliner to collapse in, and was curled up, laughing. Caleb just watched Philip as the ex-Prime Minister began to rejoin the real world. “And then, there's this new man. Are you married now, Philip?”

Philip looked at the two women, one younger, one older, both with the same sweet, innocent look on their faces, and it was too much. He busted up laughing. “Lily,” he finally managed to say, “I remember when you used to do that with your friends from college. Only I don't remember it getting so personal. And, here it is your daughter you're doing it with, now.”

“Yep. Now I do it with my daughter. Makes her seem almost real, doesn't it,” she said. “She really is human, you know. Just very fast on the uptake, and very good at judging people. Oh, not in the sense you just went through. More like 'what buttons can she push to get you to see her as just her, and not a title'. She's very good at it, and it's only just recently that I found out just HOW good. Though I should have twigged to it years ago. You'll have to meet her eclectic friends, sometime. They get into a bantering session, and you just hope the building doesn't fall down.”

“Feeling a little better, now, Philip?” asked Muriel.

“Yes. And I have no idea why!” he replied.

“Well, why don't we discuss it over lunch. You don't mind my parents being along, do you?” asked Muriel.

“Of course not. If anything, I should be asking if they mind MY being along. After all, you had plans,” he said.

“Oh, nothing that can't change at the drop of a hat,” Lily said, “or be stretched to accommodate new situations.”

“So, where to, mom?”

“Why not here? You've got a perfectly good casual area going to waste, over there, a chef that rivals anyone I've ever seen – and around here I've seen some really good ones. If we get too loud, then Mata can just throw up a shield and block it out. And you'll be close to where the action is when something blows up. Um, maybe that wasn't a good way to put that.”

“Definitely not, mother. Though I'll admit that blowups happen, we really don't need to encourage them,” Muriel said, as they moved toward the casual area and found seating. “So,” she added, as they placed orders with Chuck, “why the banter? Simple, really. You just got overloaded with the balance, Philip. But life isn't all the balance. Life, itself, is absurd – humans are absurd. Look at some of the things that humans have done, and clung to,



despite being shown that there are better ways.”

“I don't get it,” he replied.

“OK, let me see if I can break it down for you. We have intelligence. But, how many people really think in the world? Not many. Most are content to just live, do a job – whether it's something outside the house or just being a parent and homemaker, it's still a job . . . work. They react to situations around them, based on things they've been told, or emotions born of imbalances in their hormones, or attitudes they've been taught. There have been whole schools of thought that evolved around the question of what affects human maturation the most, nature or nurture. Does a person behave a certain way because it's part of their natural makeup, or because they've been taught to behave that way?”

“I don't think anyone's come to an absolute answer on that,” Philip said.

“Nope. And they won't. The question is simple. The answer isn't. It isn't an either-or situation. It's a complex blend of the two of them. You could even call it a 'third alternative' if you wanted to,” Muriel said. “But, where there are three alternatives, there's the possibility of more. Yet science keeps trying to force reality back into that either-or condition. It's absurd. So, we live with absurdity all the time and accept it as normal. Now, take the balance. Either you behave in a way that doesn't hurt people, or you behave in a way that does. It ignores the third alternative, that what you do may not have had any effect at all on the other person.”

“Wait a minute,” Philip said. “Caleb was saying something about that as I went through it. You're saying that there are some things that I'm not responsible for, simply because I wasn't the one that caused the situation!”

“Exactly. Now, let's take a scientific situation. Energy takes many forms, doesn't it?” Muriel asked.

“Well, yes, I suppose you could say so.”

“Of course I say so. There's electrical energy, chemical energy such as burning fuel, mechanical energy, like lifting objects – all that potential energy waiting for the drop. There's also thermal energy, where heat causes matter to change from one state to another, like water turning to steam. All sorts of energy. And what about light? That's a form of energy, too. You could even say that anything that has a wavelength – a frequency – has energy. Look at what sound can do. Sing a note at just the right frequency and volume and break a glass,” Muriel said.

“Now, what about intelligence? Does intelligence have energy? Or, to put it another way, can energy have intelligence?” she asked.

“Wait a minute! You can't do that! The two questions aren't synonymous!”

“Aren't they? Einstein – Energy is equal to Mass times the square of the speed of light. Or, in other words, mass and energy have a direct relationship with each other. You can

change one into the other through manipulation. With current human technology, this is mostly changing mass into energy explosively. Or by only changing portions of mass into energy in a more controlled manner, but with mass left over. So, why not the other way around? Change energy into mass? Make an object out of nothing but energy?"

"It can't be done," Philip said, around a mouthful of ham sandwich.

"My turn, Muriel," Mata said, walking into the casual area. "I LOVE doing this! It warps human minds so nicely. Philip, take my hand." He reached out to take it, and his hand passed right through it. He looked at his hand, puzzled, then looked at Mata. "Now, try it again," she said. He did, and made a solid connection. "Good. Grip it firmly. Now, make it move. Any direction you want." He tried, and the hand wouldn't move.

"I'm an Envoy," Mata said. "A soul without a body. Envoys don't have energy, they ARE energy. Well, we call it power, but it's the same thing, really. What you see is simply a construction we create to be able to interact with humans, because humans need something familiar to interact with. But what you're seeing is actually an application of power creating a solid, a shield, that has certain characteristics that we tell it to have. We're intelligent energy."

"Now," said Muriel, as Philip carefully put down the sandwich and sat back, "what is a human? Please make your answer as simple as possible."

"A soul in a body?" he asked.

"Of course. Now, think about it," Muriel said.

Mata made a chair for herself, and sat down. And Philip stared at the chair, then at Mata. "It's much worse than that," she said, smiling. "I used to be a guy. Oh, nothing so immature as an operation. Envoys have no gender. So, we create a body to suit our needs. It's all shields, anyway, so we can shape them any way we want to. And when Ted found Muriel and wanted her trained, he felt it would be better if the trainer looked like a twelve year old girl. So I did. Then I blew it. You see," she said, changing to a middle aged man with a beard, "I was Matthew. Ted was using nicknames, so Matthew became Matt." She changed back to a young female, "And, when I introduced myself, I totally forgot to change my name to something feminine. 'Hi, I'm Matt . . . uh.' Real intelligent. And she ran with it."

"So," Muriel said, taking up the thread, "Matthew – Matt – became Mata and twelve years old, and 'grew up' with me, so that now she looks sixteen. And she taught me to find my own source of power, manipulate energy to create matter – shields and clothing – and go from one place to another, ignoring the distance in between. No magic. No illusion – oh, we can create illusions, too, when we want to. But we can also make direct changes from energy to matter or matter into energy."

"So," Ted said, walking in and creating another chair, "if Envoys can do all these amazing things, and humans can do all these amazing things, what are humans? Finish your sandwich before you answer."

As Philip continued eating, Ted went on, "I thought I knew what the Envoy training was, and what I could do with it. Then I met a twelve year old girl. I got an Envoy to train her, and shortly discovered that I knew nothing. One of the ways we show a new trainee that they've successfully made a shield is to test it. With Muriel, Mata had one of her squad shoot her."

"I've still got the bullets she picked out of her shield," Fred said. "It was the first real indication to me that I was losing my daughter. That she no longer needed my protection, and that I didn't have the ability to teach her, anymore."

"Oh, nonsense, dad," Muriel said. "You've taught me a lot since then. You still do. It's just that one particular path of knowledge was something that you didn't have, then."

"Well, anyway," Ted said. "Muriel's squad shot her, and she didn't even notice, other than the noise. That much force should have rocked her, at least. Perhaps knocked her down. It didn't. The bullets stopped a foot away from her, without squashing. And she didn't realize what she'd done. Oh, she knew she'd redesigned the personal shields to be more effective. But she didn't realize what a breakthrough she'd made to something that had gone on for hundreds of years. Thousands. And when she taught it to Mata and her squad, well, it created a turmoil in Home as well as in Enclave. Nobody had told her that she couldn't do it. So, she did it. And she went right on doing things that we hadn't even imagined, and teaching us even more."

"So," said Lily, "Envoys can do all sorts of amazing things – impossible things. You've seen that humans can do the same things. Envoys are soul. Humans are soul in a body. What does that make us, Philip?"

He'd finished his sandwich, and was drinking the last of his tea. He went to put his cup down, and his hand shook. He looked at it, then very carefully put the cup on the saucer.

"Go ahead, Philip," Muriel said. "What's the absurd answer?"

"You're trying to say that humans are nothing more than Envoys in a body. That's too absurd for me to believe," Philip said.

"It is, for most people, too," Lily said. "Philip, look at me. Come on. That's the way. You see where I'm sitting, how far away I am. You see what I'm wearing, how I sit. Just look. What am I thinking, now? You used to do this trick when we were friends, years ago. I bet you still can. What am I thinking?"

"You're thinking that, if I can still reach your mind, that I can be trained." Philip said, without thinking. Then he stopped, in shock. "You ARE thinking that, aren't you," he finally said.

::Yes, Philip, I am thinking that,:: she sent. ::Would you like to learn the things that I can do? Or that Fred can do? Or Muriel or Ted? Or Mata?::

Philip closed his eyes as his trembling increased. Chuck translated in and quietly took

his tray. Fran and Bobby appeared, drawn by the distress he was going through, but Muriel motioned them to let him be for a bit longer. It was a few minutes before he straightened up and opened his eyes. He looked around the room a bit, then at Mata.

“Mata, how is it that your soul is more gray than Muriel's?” he asked

“She corrupted me,” Mata said with a grin. “Blame her.”

He looked back around, and spotted Fran and Bobby. “Gad!” he said. “You two are even whiter than Muriel.”

“That's a heck of a thing to say to a black girl,” Fran said, grinning.

“Well, I certainly don't need a physician, young lady. And as for you, young man, I don't even want to know if I need a shrink.”

Bobby just laughed. “Maybe Tommy would be better for you. He's a philosopher – our Doubting Thomas.”

“That is a bad joke,” Philip said.

“Blame him. He thought of it. Even before we were trained he kept telling us to call him Tommy because he didn't want to be known as a doubter,” Bobby said. “Then he got trained, and decided to study philosophy and religions – plural. And believes none of them. So, you tell me? Is it a joke?”

“Nope,” Philip said. “Just absurd. Which, I'm beginning to understand, is normal around here. Muriel, that was a nasty trick to play on an old man.”

“Yep. But it worked. I wasn't sure. But mom said that there were many times, when she knew you, that she thought you could read her mind. So, I wondered if you could be awakened without the training, and whether you'd then have access to the training.”

“Awakened isn't properly the term to use. More like 'made aware'. And I am that. So, how do you make shields that's different from what I used to do?” Philip asked. Muriel showed him, mentally, and casually felt the power flowing through him at the same time.

Philip played with the shield for a while then, almost preoccupied, stood up and said, “I suppose I should get this over with.” Don immediately appeared, swinging his bat. Which utterly failed to connect.

“O-K. Muriel isn't the only one that can teach us,” Don said. “That was a pretty cool trick.

“To tell you the truth, young man, I wasn't sure that I could do it. Theoretically, it's possible. But practically? I could have been in serious need of your friend's services,” Philip said, nodding to Fran. “So, you're how shields are tested, now.”

“Well, around here, anyway. By the way, I'm Don. Glad to meet you Philip,” he said, sticking out his hand. Philip absentmindedly went to take it, and failed. “Yep, neat trick, Philip. Thanks for showing me.”

“You young pup! You made me think that I hadn't gone back to solid!” Philip said.

“Yea, and it was SO worth it,” Don grinned. “So now we're even.”

Philip roared with laughter. “That we are, young man. And I hope you show the others how to do it.”

“Oh, bet on it. And my trainees, too. This is too good a gag to keep hidden,” Don replied, grinning.

# Chapter 19

## Curiouser and Curiouser (Tuesday afternoon)

"And you mean to tell me that you make ANYTHING out of shields?" asked Philip.

"Of course. Clothes, furniture, food, water, cars and trucks, one of my crew made a boat, once," Muriel said. "You can make it so it's simply shield made to look like whatever, or you can actually take it the step further and make the actual article from the shield. The last is how food and water are made. On the other hand, the clothes we wear are just shields, which allows us the ability to change what we're wearing just by changing the shields."

"Mister Heseltine . . . ."

"Betty, you are way too old to be calling me 'mister'. Now . . . what did you want to say?"

"Just that a couple of years ago we realized that we really didn't have to teach all that, since they're simple procedures, once you get the basic concept. So, we created a mental dump that will open up in about five seconds, and guide you through what you need to know," Betty said. "We've refined the training a lot since Muriel exploded onto our consciousness."

"The one thing we can't teach you that way is the last two steps in the training. Translation on earth and translation to Home. Just about anything else you'd like to learn can be done through a mental dump," Muriel said. "And I'd really like to get you through those so that, if you have to go back early, you'll be ready."

"OK, what do I need to do. I've done translations in Home. How are they different," asked Philip.

"Mostly, here, it's knowing where you're going and making sure that there isn't someone in the way or about to be in the way. It's the checks before you translate. In going to Home, it's the twist that lets you change dimensions," Muriel said. "In Home, you very often key off of people, and there are less of them per area than there are on earth for the same sized area. Here, you most often key off of the image of where you want to go. We DO key off of people, sometimes," she added. "But it's unusual, and we STILL check to be sure we have a clear landing area."

"I'm beginning to see why you're a trainer. You're careful. Ever lost anyone that you trained?"

"Once. She was grabbed, shields and all, when she made her first translation to Home. That was before we came up with a twist that an Air Force general came up with. Can't happen, now," Muriel said. "We scrambled people like you wouldn't believe, and were

too late.”

“What? What happened!”

“She got back to Home on her own. Scared stiff, and afraid she'd blown the training. The baddies were using the old style shields, and she had room to move. She just backed out of it and landed right where she was supposed to be. Before any of us could get there. Then translated back here with an Envoy as monitor, and earned her stripes. She came up with the 'killer shields'. The ones that are all spikes and charged with a major overload of power. Touch them, and you die. Even being close can knock you out,” Muriel added.

“I'd like to meet her, if it's all right,” Philip said.

“You did. She's standing right over there. Our Doctor, Fran.”

“That little thing, that's got the confidence of a wolf?”

“Yep. She grew up since then. A LOT! And not all of it was pretty,” Muriel said. “We almost lost another even before he was trained. That's when Don earned the title of Trainer. His first trainee had something nasty in him. It could have killed them both. Don talked his trainee through the process to follow, verbally, then got out of his mind, and let him handle the whole thing alone. Scariest thing I'd ever seen, and Don handled it like a pro,” Muriel said.

“Y'all talkin' about me?” said a familiar voice.

“Hi, Tex. Yep. And if you had turned around, we'd have been talking behind your back.”

“Been in some scary situations since then,” Tex said, “but that sure took the cake. Don's good. Goofy, and you wouldn't know that he's as educated as he is from the way he talks. But damn good. Oops.”

“It's all right, Tex. Mom stopped sending soap,” Muriel said, with a grin. “I guess she finally figured out that what I didn't know before, I invented.”

“I sure hope so. She had a supply of the worst tasting soap there was. Afternoon, Missus White,” Tex said. Whereupon a bar of soap headed for his mouth. He fended it off, and asked, “What the heck was THAT for?”

“Missus White, indeed, Theodore Morris. You talk proper to me, young man, or you'll discover that I can still put you over my knee,” Lily said.

“Oh, GAD! She's even using my proper name. I'm in trouble now. Yes, Lily. What ever you say Lily.”

“That's better, young man. Now, come over here and greet me properly,” Lily said. “Mind the gun. I don't need it in my ribs.”

"So, what brings you here, Tex?" Muriel asked.

"Nothing special. Had some time off, and realized I hadn't dropped by and said 'hi' in a while. You just aren't calling on me enough, anymore. I felt neglected." Tex grinned.

"You know, Tex, I've got a shovel that smells strongly of the sort of stuff you're trying to feed me. I believe it's known as an equine byproduct," Muriel said. "Now, you want to try that one again and see how it flies?"

"Roger Robinson. You haven't let him loose, yet, have you?"

"Not that I know of," Muriel said. "We'd have to check with Bob."

"I did. He doesn't have him," Tex said.

"Try Guest House? He and his parents were being taken over there. What's this all about? We vetted him. Melanie vetted him. He's clean. He got caught out undercover, and his parents got snatched. We got his parents out, and the people that did the job."

"Not all of them. You just got the worker bees. The actual brains – if you can call them that – of the group are still at large," Tex said. "We want to roll them up before you let him out of Enclave. We stumbled onto one of them, and are trying to roll up the rest. Melanie knows, and she gave the go-ahead for the operation. My boys are grilling him, now."

"Bring him in. We can unroll his mind faster than you can. You have to follow the laws of the state and country. We don't," Muriel said.

"Oh, honey, I'd hoped you'd say that. He's right outside, now. Soon as you said it, I had the boys bring him in," Tex said. Muriel just laughed.

"Mom, dad, you might want to leave. What I have to do is messy and not very polite. Oh, I'll give him a choice, of course. And, of course, he won't take it. So, I'll lock him away from his own mind. And the more he fights it, the more it will hurt. Any others that can't stand it should leave now, too. Like you, Fran," Muriel said.

"I'm staying," Fran said, and Philip echoed her words. Her mother and father did leave, and Muriel quite understood. They were gentle people and had raised her to be. But other fires had tempered her steel. They knew it and accepted it, so they smiled and gave her their love, and translated out.

Tex's men brought in the priest. A bishop, no less. "Hello," Muriel said. "I'm Muriel. Who are you?"

"ABOMINATION!" the priest cried.

"Well, Mister abomination, here's how it works. We can do this the easy way or the



hard way. The hard way is I ask you questions and you answer truthfully. The easy way is that I take the information from your mind. And the harder you fight it, the more it will hurt. Do you understand? Which shall it be?" asked Muriel.

"You will burn in hell for eternity!" the priest exclaimed.

"The easy way it is, then. Oh, you poor man. Didn't you know? There is no hell but what YOU make."

Muriel reached her mind toward the priest only to find Fran there, ahead of her. "I've got your back," Don said to Fran. "I'll record it. If it gets too bad, I can take it for you."

"Not this time, Donny boy," Fran said. "This one is mine, and I WILL see it through. But I appreciate the thought, and your having my back. Thanks, Don."

And it began. It took an hour – not because of the way he fought, that was inconsequential to the results – but because there was so much information to pull in. Name after name – the priests, in their hubris, hadn't created a cell system to protect each other. Locations, activities, conspiracies with governments guaranteed by their religious threats that were worse in their own way than the threats of organized crime. Connections to businesses, to other religions, to politics, to the underworld of criminals. An hour, and it was over. And Don quietly handed Tex a DVD with all the information on it. And Mata handed Tex a hard-copy of the results.

Tex's men took the priest, now groaning in agony, and translated out. Tex just looked at Fran. She was staring straight ahead to where the priest had been.

"Fran, honey, are you all right?" Tex asked. And she started to collapse. Don caught her, just before she hit the floor, and fed her power until she recovered.

"Hey, kid. You aren't supposed to deplete yourself, like that. Hang on, I'll give you some more to stop all the aches," Don said, cradling her like a child.

It took a few minutes, and during that time she grabbed hold of Don like she had no intention of ever letting go. But finally, slowly, she came all the way out of it. "Muriel," she said, "you have my utmost respect. Sorry about flaking out on you, like that."

"No problem, Fran. I won't say 'you shouldn't have done it'. I figure you had your own reasons, and I respect them," Muriel said. "But you did worry me some."

"At the end, I worried me some," Fran replied, and untangled herself from Don. She looked at her helper and gave an ironic laugh. "Well, I guess that lets that cat out of the bag," she said, and leaned over and kissed his mouth. "A girl just can't keep any secrets around here. Thank you, love. And thank you for bringing me back."

"Hey, what would I do without my favorite doctor?" Don replied.

“Keep it decent, children,” Muriel said. “You're only sixteen.”

“And I'm a doctor,” Fran said. “Fair warning, Muriel. Five years. Five years and you'd better have some sort of words whomped up to say over us. Because that's when we're getting married.”

“Fair enough. Warning taken,” Muriel grinned. “Just try to keep from scaring the children.”

“Just like that?” asked Philip. “THEY'RE children.”

“They're children that have been through a lot, Philip,” Muriel said. “They're both fully emancipated from their families. Fran's through a major fight when she was twelve. Don just a few months ago, as soon as he turned sixteen, and with his parent's blessing. They both have jobs they do, as well as their Ambassador salary. His parents have got a few more children at home, and enough trouble feeding them. He helps, financially, which is why they didn't fight the emancipation. And you notice that I specifically do NOT ask how close he's living to her. Not that it would matter, since they can both translate.”

“Don't you have laws about children behaving like this?”

“Philip, Enclave has exactly one law – it's illegal to break the peace. Home doesn't even need that. And the only reason that Enclave has it is because we deal with humans, and not all of them are trained. So, when things get a bit out of hand, our police commissioner can have individuals arrested and held for a judgment by the local Ambassador, under the guidance of the Leader of Home,” Muriel said with some irony. “There are times where that 'breaking the peace' results in charges being applied in the courts of the nation hosting the Enclave. Like where actions of the alleged perpetrator were planned outside of Enclave. In fact, that's just happened. You've just seen level two of that situation. A bunch of people decided to kill me, planned the whole thing out outside of Enclave, then sent an individual here to take action. That action broke the peace. But the planning for it is what the nation gets.”

“Wait a minute! You said that the Ambassador decides what happens to the individual under the guidance of the Leader of Home. You're both!” Philip said, shocked.

“Yes. Convenient, isn't it,” Muriel said, smiling. “Now, as to Don's and Fran's behavior, well, they're both adults in the eyes of the law outside Enclave, able to make and sign contracts – emancipated status did that. They are also mature enough to know and understand the consequences of their actions, and to take appropriate action. Nope, we don't have laws that govern every aspect of a person's life. Partly because we don't have the crime that takes place outside of Enclave. What we do have is a general, 'catch all' law that allows us to take appropriate action, and interface with the local and national laws outside Enclave.”

“It just all seems so irregular. Don't their parents object to their behavior?”

“Nope. In fact, Fran has visited Don's family – with him – numerous times, and they're

very happy for them both. What the kids do doesn't affect the stipend that his family gets from him. In fact, he's tried to get them to come into Enclave, a couple of times, but they're happy where they are. And as for Fran's parents, well, they threw her out when she was twelve, so she got limited emancipation status then. When she was thirteen, certain, hmm, indiscreet actions came to light concerning her parents. Her father was made aware of pending legal action against him and his wife, and the result was messy. He shot his wife, then himself. So, she doesn't have any parents to object," Muriel said, sadly. "In a sense, all the Envoys and trained humans in Enclave are now her parents. Even me."

"Oh, by the way," Muriel said, changing the subject, "that action we just took? I expect that we'll be getting a request for more assistance, shortly. Probably not until tomorrow, though. There are too many people for Tex, or even Melanie, to roll up at once. And many of them are in other countries, especially Italy. Getting permission to act will take some time. However, we have the resources of Home to draw on, and the capability to act quickly. It just takes some coordination between the nations to allow us to act."

"And you feel that that's right?" asked Philip.

"We don't operate by the rules of America or any other country," Muriel said. "As you've seen, we have capabilities to find out facts that they don't have. We also have the capability to apprehend them, all at once and without violence, that the nations don't have. That means that very few, if any, people involved in this mess will go into hiding. That's important with hate crimes. As long as there's even one that gets away, there's the potential that the crimes will continue, but from a direction we're not expecting. I know that this country doesn't want that to happen. I can only hope that other countries would like to see such crimes stopped. There is a drawback to this, though. The one country from which the most activity in this case comes from is also the home of the organization that is doing it. And that organization has a lot of influence in the government."

"So, you think that you'll get the go-ahead from everyone but them?"

"Them, and a few others," Muriel said. "However, there are ways of dealing even with that. If it comes to it, since it was property owned and governed by Home that they hit, we would be within our rights to act in self defense."

"Which is what you did with China."

"Yes," she said, flatly. "Throwing nuclear weapons at a country is inexcusable. Throwing them at one particular location for the purpose of assassinating the leader of that location, as well as the leader of the nation that owns the property, is just plain uncivilized. So we acted. However, we also acted to protect the population of the country that threw the missiles. And further, found a way to promote the welfare of the people by training those that could be trained. The result is that the living conditions of a majority of the population has already improved significantly. And those that are trained are helping those without the training, supplying food, clothing, better shelter, and medical attention. They're also policing themselves under the 'one rule' that Enclaves have. Those breaking the peace are held for the local Ambassador to deal with. We get updates, daily, and so far haven't seen any abuse

of power.”

Philip looked down and shook his head. “I wish I'd known this, before.”

“You only had to ask. Prince Taylor could have given you the information. If he didn't have it, he could have gotten it by mental link either from me or Mata. You would have been answered before you could have left him,” Muriel said. “This is supposed to be the information age. Yet the one thing lacking, particularly in governments, is information. Instead, it operates on rumor and innuendo. Or at least that's the way it appears to me.”

“Look,” she said, switching gears, “you've had a long, hard day, and you've had more thrown at you than I intended. I apologize about that. Why don't you go back to Guest House and relax, talk to your servants about any questions, watch TV, nap, whatever. Come see me tomorrow if you still have questions. I brought you here, originally, to show you what Enclave is and how it operates, and maybe see if you could be trained. We'll finish that up, tomorrow, too, even if I have to shanghai Don to help. There's no reason why you shouldn't have the complete package. This was an unusual day. I hope. And tomorrow should be a bit quieter, so I can show you around.”

“OK,” he said, smiling quietly. “I'll do that. Maybe have the guys show me how to make clothes and use shields in general, too. Thanks, Muriel. I originally suspected some collusion or conspiracy when I came here. Instead, you've been bluntly honest with me, and even tried to protect me from myself.”

“Yea, I've been told that I'm too blunt,” she laughed. “And it's true enough. Mostly, it's born of having to deal with things immediately. I don't have the TIME to be nice and gentle. See you tomorrow morning.”

## Chapter 20

“The first thing we do . . .”  
(Wednesday morning)

Philip and Muriel were sitting in her casual area when word came in from the front gate that there was a man that wanted to talk to Muriel. “I don't recall making any appointments. Mata?” asked Muriel.

“Not me. Walk in?” Mata replied.

“Maybe. How did he word it? And is he carrying anything?” Muriel asked.

“Actually, he didn't ask to see you, he asked for directions to the office of the Ambassador. And he's carrying a briefcase,” Mata said. “The gate guard says it's clean. Nothing in it but papers. No chemicals, nothing that can be combined to be explosive or poisonous. Oh, and he was polite.”

“Oh, dear. That sounds ominous. OK, bring him in,” Muriel said.

Moments later a man in an expensive suit, and with a brief case, walked into her office. “Hello,” he said to Mata, “I'm looking for the Ambassador.” Mata pointed to the casual area.

As he walked into the casual area he again said, “Hello, I'm looking for the Ambassador.”

“Well,” Muriel said, “points for not making assumptions based on gender, Philip.”

“True, Muriel, but we'd have to take points off for not being able to read the sign on your window that's in large print, and for not introducing himself. A case of Henry the Sixth?”

“Definitely. Part two, act four, scene two, if I remember right,” Muriel said.

“What ARE you people talking about? I'm here to see the Ambassador,” the man said.

“Well, mister unknown, it's like this. My name is Muriel, and I'm the Ambassador from Home to the people of earth, and the Leader of Home. I know I don't have any appointments for this morning, and you haven't introduced yourself or stated your reason for being here, so Philip and I have been trying to determine what you may be. Now,” she added, “based on what we've observed, we figure you're a lawyer, hence the reference to Shakespeare. We came to that conclusion from a number of factors. One, you're well dressed, polite, and carry a briefcase. Second, you're smart enough to not make assumptions as to who the Ambassador is, hence the comment about gender. Third, you're too stupid to read the sign on my window that would TELL you that the Ambassador is a woman named Muriel. So, why don't we start with your name and business.”

"Um, this really should be done in private, Ambassador."

"My office," said Muriel, "my rules. You're a walk-in. No appointment. And you're still dodging. Philip stays. He's here to see how an Enclave is run. And just call me Muriel."

"Very well. My name is Robert Dillmore, of Fenster, Underwood and Dillmore," he said.

"Ah, yes! I've heard of FUD," Muriel said, brightly, and Mata wiped off her monitor screen. Again. "They're right up there with Dewey, Cheatem and Howe in the ranks of Law Firms," she said, referencing the Three Stooges.

Mata just gave Muriel a dirty look and said, "You're not supposed to stack them up so tight. Give me time to get another mouthful, first, will you?" Philip, by this time, was roaring with laughter.

"I really don't think this is a time for levity," Dillmore said. "I'm here to see to the release of my client."

"Really," said Muriel. "Bob," she said and sent, "are we holding anyone, now?"

"Nope," Bob said, translating in. "Melanie and her crew took the priests and flight crew and turned them over to the FBI. That was the last of them."

"I thought so. Well, Mister Dillmore, I think you've come to the wrong place."

"I know for fact that you have my client, here, and I demand that you produce him," Dillmore said.

"Just who is your client?" Muriel asked, suspecting what the answer would be.

"Roger Robinson. You've got him here on some trumped up charges. I want to know what those charges are, and the amount of the bail. You amateurs really should learn proper legal procedures."

"Mister Dillmore, if that is your name, you just failed the sniff test. Roger Robinson is a guest here, yes. But he's not being held on any charges," Muriel said. "Mata, what do you have on this man and his law firm?"

"The man exists, the law firm doesn't. He is a lawyer, and he's representing what's left of the Curia, but he's an independent. He's just here to try to get his hands on Roger by spreading Fear, Uncertainty and Doubt," Mata replied. "I think they intend to complete what you thwarted. If he doesn't exist, then he can't testify against them."

"Ah, yes. Typical bullying tactics," Muriel replied. "Mister Dillmore, we do know proper legal procedures. Both those of America and of Home. And, as you are standing on property owned by Home, the American procedures don't apply. As a lawyer, you should know that."

But it seems that every lawyer I've met since I came here is of the belief that American law trumps all others. And that's the reason that Philip suggested that bit of Shakespeare. We have lawyers here in Enclave, but they are definitely NOT of that one third of graduating lawyers that graduated in the LOWER third of their class. As long as America has laws there will be a need for GOOD lawyers. You're not one of them. We know that Roger Robinson didn't call you in, since he was cleared of any wrongdoing before he even had a chance to make a call. He is not your client. So, all of this has been bluff and bluster. However, I'll be kind. I'll contact Melanie and see what she wants to do with you."

"Who is this Melanie you keep talking about?" Dillmore asked.

"She used to be head of the President's detail, Secret Service. She's been kicked upstairs a couple of notches, and looks to take over the entire thing someday," Muriel said. "She's also Envoy trained, and has trained many of the USSS. The rest were trained by each other. Her department is also in charge of Homeland Security and CIA."

"Oh. Um, you don't really have to contact her, do you?" Dillmore asked.

"Melanie," Muriel sent and said, "I've got a Robert Dillmore here, that's looking for Roger Robinson. He claimed to be his attorney, but Roger never made 'the phone call'. What do you want to do with him?"

"Oh, goodie! Fresh meat," Melanie said, translating in. "Hi, Dillmore! Still chasing lost causes, I see. Muriel, this guy is so far down on the food chain that he makes the bigger fishes barf. Got a record of your 'discussion' with him?"

"Sure. 'You know my methods, Watson.' Anything like this gets recorded for posterior."

"In other words," Mata said, "she's talking out of her butt again."

"Either that, or chewing butt," Muriel said. "Here you go." A glance at poor Philip showed that he was trying vainly to suppress his laughter. Melanie translated back out with the hapless Dillmore, who looked like he'd rather be anywhere else.

"Now," Muriel said to Philip, "when you're through laughing at me, we've got work to do, and possibly some traveling to do, too." She pulled out her phone and speed-dialed Russia. "Sergei, dobroye utro!" she said, on speaker-phone.

"More like evening, here, Muriel. But I'll accept the thought. What's up?" he replied.

"A couple of things. First, I've got the short list down to either you or Taiwan," she said. "I thought it might be a good idea to come see you and see what you thought."

"That one's easy," Sergei replied. "Taiwan should get first choice. They went through hell with their Western neighbor. If they want it, they deserve it. Otherwise, we'd be happy to host the signing. Especially since you'd be doing all the actual building and hosting. We'd just be supplying the land, and maybe some incidentals. What's your second thing?"

“About the training.”

“Oh. I should have realized. I hadn't gotten back to you. What do you need to select from?”

“Like I said in your office, twelve to fourteen year olds are best, but be prepared for some VERY mature children when I get done,” Muriel said. “Next would be just about anybody that doesn't have 'issues'. Obvious ones, I mean. They'll get filtered out by the selection process, anyway, but that keeps the numbers of dropouts down to a manageable level.”

“OK, I'll put together a list as soon as I can. I take it that they would be your 'display pieces'?”

“That, and possible Ambassadors,” Muriel said, “depending on their temperament.”

“Hmm. How about mixed, between children and adults,” asked Sergei.

“Possible. But the selection of THE Ambassador might cause friction.”

“Not with the people I'm thinking about, Muriel. Three families that are very close to each other,” Sergei said. “That is, if they're willing to participate. Give me a couple of minutes, and I'll call you back. Will you be bringing people with you?”

“Of course. My squads, at least, and more if they're needed. I can always call for more if you REALLY surprise me. Training in the basics will probably take half a day to a day. Refinement is really up to them,” she said.

“I'll keep that in mind. And thanks for the offer on the signing.”

“No problem, Sergei. Truth? It really was between you and Taiwan, and I rather favored Taiwan for the same reason that you did. But I still felt that you should be offered first refusal,” Muriel said.

“I understand, and I appreciate your candor. It's refreshing dealing with you. You don't beat around the bush, and you don't play political games. In this business, it's so unusual that others would be constantly looking to see what your angle was. I'll call you back.”

When Sergei had hung up, Muriel told Philip, “We can't do anything with Taiwan until late this afternoon. Probably around five or six o'clock. It's the middle of the night for them. But we can finish up your formal training, and get that out of the way. Unless you'd rather wait until your back home and have Taylor do it.”

“No. Whatever you think is best,” he replied.

“OK, I understand that you had quite a session with your servants at Guest House, last



night.”

“Oh, now THAT'S an understatement. I haven't laughed so hard in my life. But they gave me the dump on how to turn images of clothing into the real thing, and how to adjust to make it comfortable,” he said, grinning. “However, they did get me to bed at a decent hour, so I can take the work.”

“OK, then if you don't mind, I'm going to turn you over to Don to show you translating on earth and to Home and back. I've got some work I need to catch up on, and it would be boring for you to sit here and watch me stare at a screen for the next hour or so,” Muriel said.

“OK, by me. Or anyone, if he's busy,” Philip said.

::Don, can I hand off to you?::

::Sure, Muriel. I'll be right there::

“OK, he's coming. I'll be honest, I haven't trained anyone in a while, and I don't know what spots are open and available, anymore. He's training kids all the time, and continues drilling them in various aspects that go beyond the basics.”

“Are you trying to sell him to me?” asked Philip with a grin.

“Nope, stalling for time until he gets here. If he's in the middle of setting up a presentation, then it could take a couple of minutes for him to untangle himself,” she said.

“And he'd break off just to monitor me around?”

“Yep. Don believes in the training. As much as I do. Maybe more,” Muriel said. “He also believes in education. I have no idea how many degrees he has, now. Or, I should say, disciplines, because the degrees conferred are PhDs. He does presentations to classes in the city – presentations in history, that include things like mathematics, art, music, politics, and philosophy for periods of history. And the presentations are in three dimensions. And that's what he may be building or editing is a presentation. It takes time to extract himself from something like that.”

“Oh, not all that long, Muriel,” Don said. “Besides, this was just instructions on how to edit a presentation for a bunch of kids that are under ten. So, Philip is in need of some training. No problem. In fact, it will probably be more of a refresher course for you than actual training. Just making sure that you have the practice to make the routine almost instinctive. Besides, it'll give you a chance to try one of the restaurants, here. I think you'll like it.”

“But, I'm taking you from your work,” Philip said.

“Not really,” Don replied. “My schedule is loose enough that I can do all sorts of things between assignments. This one isn't needed until next week sometime. And the edits are

actually just a case of making sure that everything is appropriate to the age group. Mostly cleaning up violence and language on a presentation that I use with teens. And my squad usually does the edits for me. These are kids that can't make the mental link to get this as a dump. So, I show them what life was like for the various classes of people during periods of history, and go over some of the things like music, art, and hard sciences of the times. For this age, it means leaving out some things that would disturb them – some of the conflicts in the Dark Ages were pretty bad. But there was a lot, even without the conflicts, that the kids can learn about. Well, actually any period had it's down side. But the kids don't really need to know all the dirty details at this age."

"You do this often?"

"About once a month per school. I've got five schools in the city that I do this with. This is the only school where I'm dealing with kids this young, kinda an experiment on the part of the school. Last year, I taught middle school age kids in that area, and this is a presentation I gave to them. So I trim it down a bit, and aim the speech at a lower age group. The kids enjoy it because it's fun. The teachers enjoy it because the kids learn more in one session then they do all year in history. The parents enjoy it because suddenly kids are interested in learning. And the school system enjoys it because grade averages go way up. And for me, it's just plain fun. A real blast. Oh, and as a side benefit, I get to have a chance to see what kids may develop the ability to make the link and take the training, later on," Don said.

"You really enjoy teaching," Philip said.

"Oh, yea. It's a kick. Oh, that's not to say that there aren't times when it's bad. But, overall, yea, I enjoy it," Don said, leading the man out to see the places he'd be translating to.

# Chapter 21

## Ever Have One of Those Days? (Wednesday afternoon)

*Ever have one of those days?* Muriel asked herself. *Well, yes! Today was one,* her mind replied, as she sat down at her desk for the third time. First, it had been a typographical error in a company report that had suggested that company lost millions of dollars in the past quarter. The fix was easy – just correct the typo. FINDING the typo was the hard and tedious part, that took over an hour. Then, there was the car that wouldn't run. No logical reason could be found. Jeff and the head of assembly had been over the car numerous times. The fix for that had been simple. Power hadn't been connected to the power converter. The reason, again, had taken time to discover. And that on top of the line being down for an hour before that. The last step in assembling the car was the power connection. The man that did that had been distracted, and the car had been pushed off the line by the one behind it. And add to that the call from Sergei, begging off the possible families to be trained because of political ramifications.

And then there was the call. A VERY unexpected call. Chun had called to say that the President of Taiwan wanted to meet with Muriel and her as soon as possible. All sorts of possible reasons chased each other through Muriel's head, including that Taiwan now wanted to take over the government of China, based on their constitution.

A grinning and very relaxed Philip had returned just before the phone call. He'd passed translating on earth and to Home with flying colors, and had met a former Prime Minister in Home that had upbraided him for being a fool, and congratulated him on getting trained. Chun and the Taiwanese President had allowed him to join the conversation as an observer, since he was a guest of Enclave and learning about all that went on in one.

Mata, Philip and Muriel translated to a spot outside Chun's office along with one squad for show. The President was allowed a squad, but cautioned that they would have to arrive unarmed, since weapons weren't allowed in the Enclave of China. The President had accepted the restriction and Chun had translated him and his squad to her office. Thus it was that two Ambassadors and a President, and their respective squads met outside Chun's office building.

When Muriel moved to greet the two, her squad and Mata went and greeted the President's squad, causing some confusion but finally some very happy smiles. The three squads went in to the break room area of the office, and the three principals and Philip moved to Chun's casual area. Tea was offered and accepted as they settled into the comfortable chairs.

"Well," Chun said, "I've told the President that we have no designs on his country, that we'd be glad to help his people whenever needed, even defend them against outsiders if needed. I don't think he believed me," she added with an understanding smile.

"It's not so much that I don't believe you as that I don't see what's in it for you?" the President replied.

"Friendship," Muriel said. "Nothing more than that. Haven't you ever had friends that wanted nothing more from you than the joy of your friendship?"

"Few," he responded. "And not for a long time. That's what makes me suspicious of this. So, what happens to the Republic of China, now?"

"What do you want to have happen?" Muriel answered the question with a question. "You are yourselves. You have a government that, as far as we can tell, is respected by its citizens. You have a flourishing economy, and the respect of other countries. Oh, and one other thing – there's no longer any obstacle to you being recognized in the United Nations. The Enclave of China has no government of its own, since it is just an extension of Home. Chun is its chief Ambassador, true, but that just means she is the administrator for things that a government would normally see to – food, water, sewage, clothing, medical, and protection are all available to the people. They can find what jobs give them joy, or do no work and still have the benefits of the Envoy training, which guarantees all of that."

"Why would anyone work if they could get it all for free?" he asked.

"The same reason that Chun and I do. And administration can be work, believe me. Oh, I have benefits beyond what most trainees have, but those are more to fill out my job than to act as compensation. Nope, it's challenging, and satisfying work, despite some negatives along the way. And I've had them, too," she said. "It's FUN!"

::Tell him about your friends?: Philip sent as a question.

"I'll give you another example," Muriel said, smiling. "I have twelve friends that originally came with me, shortly after I was trained. Well, in fact, before I was completely trained. They're now Ambassadors in their own right. Over a third of them have nothing to do. The rest have all found jobs that they like doing, despite occasional frustrations. All of them have the same benefits that other trainees have, as well as the perks that go with being Ambassadors. Sometimes we call on them for help, and they're happy to – it makes them feel important and useful. But they're still looking for that job that 'calls to them'. You're welcome to come to the American Enclave and see for yourself."

::Good suggestion, Philip. Thanks,:: Muriel sent back.

"What do your friends do, then?" the President asked.

"May I?" asked Philip. At a nod from Chun and Muriel, he went on, "I've visited them. I don't know what they all do, but I can give you some examples. One is a trainer and teacher. He teaches history to school kids that can't take the training for whatever reason. And such teaching, complete with three dimensional landscapes and models that show the kids what it was like living during the period for the various classes of people. Another is a doctor. At

sixteen! And GOOD! One is a counselor for troubled people. Another 'jousts' with academics in the field of philosophy, and has an off-beat sense of humor. Still another is an engineer in several disciplines as well as a computer programmer. He's the one that invented and designed the cars you may have heard about. Still another is an interior decorator, architect, and clothing designer. This office – this building – attest to her abilities. I've never seen anything like it. Most of them chose these jobs when they were twelve years old, the same age that Muriel became the Leader of Home. And they are ALL happy. They're doing what they want to do, and are respected both in Enclave and outside it in the American society for their contribution."

"How is it that they can do these things at this young age?" asked the President.

"The training," Muriel replied. "The initial stage is making a mental link. The next is gaining their power to sustain the link, and that drives everything else that we do. As a result, they can have the knowledge of a discipline, at the level of a PhD, dumped into their minds in minutes, and have it opened up and useful in a couple of days."

"So, those are some of your friends. What do the rest do?"

"Mostly, whatever they want to," Muriel said. "They're always the first to show up at traffic accidents and fires, rescuing people and healing them. They also are the first to go out to find lost people, sometimes taking along law enforcement if there's a possibility of foul play. They train or help train kids that are in our school, guide guests, and sometimes represent Home in the society outside Enclave. They've engaged in activities that have earned them the same 'thin red line' that I have on my formal uniform, that indicates serving in potentially life-threatening action."

"Were they involved in the . . . um . . . removal of the PRC army and government?"

"No, the military were removed by the Regiment of Home, after they'd thrown nuclear missiles at me. And Ambassador Chun removed the Government which, without the military to enforce their will, was effectively eliminated already. It was because of that and the protections that Home set up around the country that Home accepted the request of the citizens that the country become an Enclave," Muriel replied.

"But . . . this is highly irregular. The government of the Republic of China is the only legitimate government of all of China," he said.

"Why? Because you have it in your constitution?" Muriel asked. "Sir, your country never held the position of Government to the mainland – that piece of real estate that the world knows as China – despite what your constitution says. Your people were defeated by the communists, and you were forced to flee to Taiwan. In all the years since that happened your government has done nothing to recover the mainland. By attacking the American Enclave, the communists created a state of war in fact, if not in declaration. A war that ended much faster than they thought it would, first with the destruction of the missiles they'd sent, then with the elimination of their military and the government. A government which, by the way, was offered the opportunity to change their ways. They refused, and paid the price for

having caused the war. The majority of the people took the Envoy training – and that mass training was a massive effort – and decided they'd much rather be administered than governed. No, sir," Muriel said, "there will be no takeover of the mainland by the Republic of China based on words written by dreamers who could not achieve their dream."

"I'm sorry you feel this way," the President said. "I'm afraid the World Court may see it otherwise. We hold a legitimate claim to the country. We insist that you renounce your 'administration' immediately and turn it over to us."

"Don't be absurd, Mister President," Chun said, quietly. "China is now the property of a whole other world, and there is no way that you can force over a billion people to give up their homes and lives based on some fiction that never had a basis in fact. Just a legal fiction."

"Besides," Muriel said, "Why do you think that the World Court has jurisdiction over Home? They cannot go there, unassisted. We are not signatories to any of the organizations that supposedly govern international agreements and trade. We made that plain to the United Nations when the PRC thought to complain to them. Their Ambassador was crying at great length about how abused his government was by the destruction of its military. What he didn't realize was that that government that he represented no longer existed."

Muriel paused, and took a sip of tea. "Mister President, I am just a girl. But I am a girl that is thoroughly tired of people thinking that they can bully me. We – Home and all the Enclaves – offer you peace. We offer you aid in emergencies. We offer you the opportunity to get the Envoy training, and further, education far beyond any offered by the schools of earth. Yet you sit there and cry, like a little boy that has broken his toys and now wants them restored. It's not going to happen, sir. The people of this country have spoken. They've made their decision. Now, it's up to you and your government to decide how you will behave in the future – like adults? Or like little children that don't get their own way and throw a temper tantrum. Choose wisely. I do not behave well around bullies."

"Now, Mister President, I think it's time that you went back to your country and explain to your people that there is a difference between fantasy and reality," said Chun. "This," she emphasized, "is the reality. We are here. And not all the forces of earth can dislodge us. But, we are here in peace to those that would behave peacefully. We are not defenseless. We are not weaponless. We are not vulnerable. We have offered much to you, and asked nothing in return but to be left in peace. The offer is still there. As long as you are peaceful toward us, we don't care what you do. Polite discussion will be accepted, but our position remains adamant. Impolite actions such as harassment or force, will be dealt with as I, the administrator of this Enclave, feel is necessary. It is not necessary for you to agree to this warning. It is sufficient that it has been given to you and will be enforced, whether you agree or not. Gather your troops, Mister President. You're going home."

The shock to the President was quite evident. His face and whole bearing expressed it in unmistakable terms. This was not the way that diplomatic missions were conducted. One didn't make ultimatums then throw the President of a country out. But these two women had just done it. Yes, his face and body language said all that, and maybe more. But he wasn't given the opportunity to complain. In an instant he and his security squad were out front of

Chun's office building, then translated back to the same location from which they came.

"Chun," Muriel said, "it looks like Russia will be hosting the signing of the treaty. Taiwan has just removed themselves from the list. Will that suit your purposes? Should I continue looking?"

"I have no problem with Russia. They haven't tried anything like that with me. I DO apologize for calling you out for a lost cause, though. Had I known that he was going to try to spring that archaic bit of fluff in their constitution I wouldn't have invited him to come and talk," Chun said. "Philip, your words were good, and certainly didn't break your observer status. You asked, first, and gave only your views on Muriel's friends. Thank you."

"Madam Ambassador," he began.

"Just Chun, please. Between friends no such formalities are necessary," she replied.

"Very well, Chun," he continued, smiling. "I have come to realize that my position with the British government and my stand against your administration of China was wrong. I apologize that I ever took that stand. You have done well, here, from what I see and have been told. You will have no more animosity from me. In fact, you will have my whole-hearted support, for what it's worth. And I would hope that you would allow me to return, sometime, to see more of your country."

"Of course you can return," said Chun. "Lately, though, if you need to see me, it would be best to send ahead to see where I am. I've been going all over the country making sure that administrative areas are set up, and that people have what they need. It also serves to let the people have a face to see that goes with the title and responsibilities. We're still hovering at about seventy five percent trained. Mostly because the rest are small villages that haven't been reached, yet, with trained personnel. That's part of the reason that I'm running all over – trying to get administrators to get people or Envoys out there to them. The services are running to them, but there's still food, clothing, and medical that's needed."

"Anything we can do to help?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, we're getting there. As far as we can tell, so far, people are managing. And the word is out to the administrators to 'get to the border' – reach the people in the outreaches – as quickly as possible. More are checking in with results. I expect the figures to jump to ninety percent by Saturday," Chun replied. "Some of these villages aren't even on the map, so flooding the area would be pointless."

"Philip," Chun said, smiling ironically at the man, "You've been eying the walls in here whenever you thought you could get away with it without anyone knowing. They're like a very large brush painting. They're also much easier to see in a smaller form. Would you like a copy? We even have one version that has all the locations marked – in English, no less, so that you'd know what's represented. One of Muriel's friends, Carla, gave them to me when she'd finished the work and realized that I'd twigged to their being a massive landscape."

“But, how did she do it?”

“Oh, different color woods, a wash over the painted plaster, and the whole thing sealed up so that it would last far longer than I ever would,” Chun replied. “You'd have to ask her about all the details. Oh! These copies show areas that are now hidden by furniture. They also include the blue dragon, above my head, as if it were descending from the gates of paradise. Her team put together the locations, and she translated them into this while they, in her words, 'piddled around with the rest of the building and furniture'. Piddled around, indeed. This building and all its contents are magnificent. She gave me bare-wall views of each of the rooms and areas, and I've had my squads go through and do the same with the furniture in place. I asked them to put the whole thing together as a book for people. Come to think of it, that might be better for you. That includes this office, and detailed notations concerning the locations.”

As she spoke, the leader of the yellow phoenix squad came in with two large books, the covers of which were beautifully embossed and gilded leather. The leader presented one to Philip, and the other to Muriel. “I know that Carla will say that she doesn't want it,” Chun said. “But I also know youth. If she doesn't accept it now, perhaps you would hold it for her for the future. Artists, such as she, should have something they can use to advertise their abilities. And this building speaks more for her than any words can.”

“I'll do that,” Muriel said, with a grin. “And I think I know just how to present it to her so she won't refuse. The advantages of having known her for so long. I know just what buttons to push.” Chun laughed, and escorted them to the door.



# Chapter 22

## Building

(Thursday morning)

Sergei was good at his word. As soon as Muriel told him that Russia had been selected as the site of the signing, he immediately gave her an image – actually a photograph – of the site. It was a short ways outside Moscow in what had once been a warehousing district. The warehouses were now empty and the site was scheduled for destruction. By giving it to her, he served two purposes. First, the destruction would be accomplished by Envoys from Home. Second, when the signing was over, the site would become a resort area and conference center. Actually, there was a third side to that, in a sense. The road to the site would have to be redone, with good exits from it into the site, and Ted volunteered to accomplish that.

Carla, in the mean time, had been working on architectural models, not sure until Muriel told her exactly what country would be the host. Now, she went into a fever pitch of designing the suites – floors, actually – that would house the principals and their security. Four floors were designated just for them, all above the main floor and conference center where the signing would be staged. The rooms for the principals, themselves, would be duplicates of the rooms they were used to. In Muriel's case, there was a door instead of an elevator that led to the main hall for the floor. Much the same was done for Chun, for her comfort and the care of her child. The American President and the British Queen both had their normal family area familiar from the White House and the Palace.

Security forces were situated on the other side of the hall, in rooms very like their break rooms, in the case of Muriel and Chun. Barracks style rooms were designed for the 'Jolly Greens' that would bring the Queen, and normal two person rooms were designed for the Secret Service that would protect the President. Meals would be taken in an elegant and very Russian looking dining room at whatever time the people chose, and of whatever styles they wanted. Security would take their meals in shifts, to allow at least one squad to be with their principal. Or, they could have them in their rooms, if they wished.

To one side of the main building would be the guest quarters, set up much like Guest House in America. To the other would be visitors quarters, a much larger building, as Muriel expected that not only the Russian people but many from all over the world would want to witness the signing. Again, it would be much like the American Guest House, but there would be nominal charges for staying and meals. Oh, nothing extravagant, and Russia would get the proceeds from it. Basically, if people could afford to come to Russia, then they'd be able to afford staying for four or five days.

And then, Muriel smiled. Sergei didn't realize that she knew, but he wanted a place to start an Enclave, and such a site would be a good beginning, without the building. And she knew because of the various activities that he'd suggested that she plan for. Among them was offering the training to those that were capable of taking it. This was a far cry from

previous Russian Presidents, that actually tried to move that poor country back into communism. But Sergei was dynamic, a zealous personality that was larger than life, and the population looked up to him. He'd done more to promote the country, improve its economy and get rid of the criminal element than any – and maybe all – of the previous Presidents. Well, she'd help him out all she could without breaking the tradition that Enclaves stayed out of internal affairs or the support of one government.

Muriel had spent part of the morning in Russia, making sure that things were running smoothly. Ted had already had a crew take care of the road and the exit to the complex. He'd even made sure that the parking lot was adequate for the projected number of people that would be using it. This was the sort of thing that he was good at. Carla was overseeing the buildings, so that was covered. And Muriel's friends were overseeing setting up events and activities. Mata had a list of people to invite as guests, as did Huang Fu, Sid, and Melanie, and invitations were being sent by the simple expedient of translating them directly to the people. The queen was seeing to – well, really, it was her people – the advertising of the event in the media. And so was Sergei. Really, all Muriel had to do was show up occasionally and look important. And that wasn't even for those that were actually doing the work, but for Sergei and his political opponents.

So, Muriel found herself with time on her hands, for a change. What to do. Then she remembered Frank's instructions on carving, and how to make it look real. 'Start with something you know,' he'd said. Well, OK. She didn't have a model to work from, but she did have an idea that she didn't really need one for some subjects.

So, she put together a model in her mind, slowly, because she was posing it, supplying a base for it, looking at it from all angles. When she thought she had it pretty well in mind, she turned it into shields with enough color to show her what it looked like. It was almost there, but something was lacking, so finally she colored it in in natural colors of the actual items and took a look. An adjustment here, a bit of a change there, and suddenly she realized what it lacked. Life. Well, the illusion of life, anyway. On her desk were two figures, bodies facing front and walking, looking at each other and holding hands, and grinning at each other. Yes. Almost. One was wearing a fly plaid, and she caused the shields to change to make it look like the wind caught it a bit. Then the hair on both the figures.

She looked again. Not bad for a first time. A couple more adjustments to make them look more relaxed and less stiff, checked the coloration then solidified the statue. She was just moving it to the side of her desk when Ted walked in.

"Muriel," he said, "Have you been to the site, lately?"

"Yea, just got back about an hour ago. Sergei was in a bit of a dither, but I got him calmed down. We were doing the building in the old style Russian architecture, but using three different colors of granite. It wasn't until we got it up to a certain point that he could see what we were doing, then broke out laughing and approving what we were doing. He's not used to our style of building, with shields. Basically, it looks like a rich country mansion, but much bigger. Why? Is something wrong?"

"No, or I don't think so. Bart had a note for me that Sergei'd called, but I think the time was while you were still there," he said, and showed her the note.

"Yep. That was just before I located him, and about ten minutes before the front of the building went up, and he saw what we were doing. He really did seem pleased. But if you want to talk to him and be sure, feel free," she said, holding her breath.

Fortunately, she didn't have to hold it long. "What's this?" he said, picking up the statue. "Nice work, but whoever did it made a mistake. That's obviously you in what you call your 'fighting formals', with the bloused combat boots. But the other figure is in the old style uniform. The one you wore when you were first trained. Remember?"

"Oh, yea, I remember, very well."

"But who is it? I don't remember any dirty blonds that you trained before you changed the uniforms. It's not one of your friends. And that grin . . . that grin and that old style uniform! It's YOU! You at twelve looking at you now. And you now looking back, with that same grin. GAD! That's weird. Like the past looking at the future looking at the past. Who did this? It had to have taken days . . . weeks maybe to get all the details in it. I can almost see the fringe in the plaid move. And the hair." He set it back on the desk, and rubbed his hands on the sides of his pant legs, unconsciously.

Muriel held her tongue, and let him work it out. "You know, I think that's how you did it. You had a plan, didn't you. You, looking forward. And as the plan unfolded you kept checking back to make sure that you were on the right track, and still following what you'd seen," he finally said.

"Nope. No plan. An idea. Plans can be destroyed, especially over time. But an idea gives you a shape and a direction. I had an idea of what I was going to have to do. A rather vague idea, at that time. But as it went along, and the parts fell into place, the idea became more and more real. And the idea is still working," she said.

"So, who made this for you. Frank?"

"Nope, oh and your wrong about the amount of time. It only took about an hour," she said, teasing him. But she couldn't help it. She grinned. And it was the same grin as the figures in the statue – that 'I just put something over on someone' grin.

Ted looked at the figures, then at her. "YOU did this? How?"

"Frank gave me the instructions on how to carve, but I hadn't had the chance to do anything. He also told me that, at first, I should do something that I know well. Well, I know me well. Both then and now. So, I put the two figures together, posed them, then turned them into shields and worked on them a bit, then colored them in. Want one?" she asked.

Again, she held her breath. It was possible that, even though she'd suggested it casually, that he'd freeze up at the thought of having a statue of her. "Yes," he finally said.

"I'd love to have one, but I don't have a place to put it."

"You could always put up another shelf," she said, thinking of the one time she saw his apartment.

"Hmm. Yea, I could do that. OK, if you could get someone to make a copy, I'd appreciate it," he said.

"No problem," she replied, and concentrated for a minute. An exact duplicate of the statue appeared in front of her, and she placed it where the first one had been. "There you go," she said, pointing at the one in front of Ted.

"But . . . that's your original. It had to have taken a lot of work to do!"

"Yea, some. But having done it, I can do it again. I saved the pattern. Besides, this was just a training piece – a learning experience. I'll get better," she said.

"I don't see how. This is beautiful. And tells a story. Heck, it almost looks like it could move."

"Now, there's a thought. I wonder if I could program the shields to do something like that. Maybe just to show the breeze blowing their hair and the plaid. I'll have to think about it," Muriel said. "Of course, if I get good enough, then I could have them moving and talking. Then you'd have three of me to put up with," she added with a wicked grin.

"Um . . . no. I'd just as soon you didn't." He paused, but he couldn't hold his serious expression, and they both laughed. "So, what's on for today?"

"Nothing, really, other than checking in with the building site once in a while, to see if there's any problems. I'll go back in another hour or so and make my rounds, again," Muriel said.

And, before she could say anything more, an Envoy she recognized but couldn't remember where came into her office. "I felt something," he said. "Something familiar, but different. Did you . . . oh, my. That's beautiful. And you did it?"

That's when it hit her who he was. "Yea, Steve. I was just playing around with what Frank taught me. Nothing like the works you create."

"Oh, no! Much MORE than the things I do. This is three dimensional. I never tried working in three dimensions. My paintings started out as flat, then the illusion of three dimensions, then, yea, I did three dimensional paintings, but they were still paintings, and not really a construction. This . . . this is beautiful and expressive."

"Would you like a copy? And how did you know that I made it?" Muriel asked.

"I'd love one, but I'd hate to put you to the trouble. And I felt someone creating

something. When you use the power that way, in such detail, it can be felt by others who are also creative. I just followed the pull. And I knew you did it when I saw it, because it has your signature in it.” As he spoke, Muriel concentrated and created a second copy of the statue and handed it to him.

“Steve, I think I know why you want it. Go ahead and take it apart. See what I did, and how. Talk to Frank, he taught me how to carve. If you need another, let me know. I’ll be happy to make one for you.”

“Thank you, Muriel. Thank you so much,” he said, as he wandered out of her office.

“You’re welcome,” she said, as he went through the doors.

“Well, you seem to have made a hit. Was that . . . ?” Ted asked.

“Steve. The artist from the gallery. The one that does the phenomenal spacescapes and landscapes. Yea. Makes me feel goose-bumpy. He’s a master at what he does, and here he comes and wants my little effort?” Muriel asked.

“I’d say that it was more than a LITTLE effort.”

“Yea, but I really wasn’t going to show it to anybody until Frank had a chance to critique it. After all, he taught me. I’ve probably done something wrong with it, that I should correct.”

“Don’t sell yourself short, Muriel,” Ted said. “An artist always sees faults in her work. Or things that can be improved. Sometimes it’s the faults that make the work more valuable, because they show a bit of the artist’s mind at work.”

“Listen to him,” Frank said, as he came in. “Oh, I just came in to take a short break. The main building is done, and I’ll be doing the other two, shortly. And Sergei is VERY happy with it. Now, let me see this masterpiece.” He took the one from Ted’s hands and looked it all over. “Hmm. Yes. Um, hmm, I see what you did, there. Oh, yes, very nice. Oh, and you didn’t try to just move the cloth and hair, you actually softened the shields there and blew on them to make the effect. VERY nice. Something that most artists wouldn’t think to do. May I see the copy, now?”

Muriel silently handed him the copy she’d made. He studied it for a minute or two, while she sat on pins and needles waiting for a verdict. “Good!” he finally said.

“OK, so what did I do wrong?” Muriel asked.

“Nothing. You thought it out well. Took you most of the hour, didn’t it? Then applied it and made corrections, then applied the color and made a few more corrections, mostly in making the wind-blown look. Then stopped. And that was the best part. You stopped. You didn’t try to go further, and end up messing the whole thing up. Very professional,” Frank said. “And Steve was right, I could even feel it on the other side of the world. That was a LOT of work you put into the initial creation. You did very well. I’m not sure I could do as well.

And your speed will increase in time, as you practice.”

“Then, it's a matter of imaging,” Muriel said.

“Yep. If you're doing stock things, like I do for the most part, then you get a bunch of images ahead, and store them. Maybe even make a practice piece to be sure they're the way you want them. Then you can expand them to fit. Specialty work, though, takes a different skill. You have to be able to create the image quickly and accurately, so it's only those few seconds to make corrections at the end that take the time,” Frank said.

“And I really did all right?”

“Pfft! Like I said, you did as well or better than I can. Probably better. I'll take a deeper look later, after the signing. Nope, that's a GOOD piece. You may have a bunch of people wanting copies. Especially with the 'past to future' theme of it. Excellent, and outrageous, like you always are,” he said with a grin.

“Oh, wow!” she said, somewhat in shock.

“Expecting me to come down hard on you? Not with a piece like that, I wouldn't,” he said. “I don't usually do full three dimensional, because you have to see it from all the angles and make sure it's right. And I'm not as good at doing that. That's why I said that it might be BETTER than I can do. Now,” he added, “are you two going back with me? I think Sergei wants to talk with you. Oh, he's not unhappy with anything. He just said that he wanted to talk.”

“Yea, I suppose we should,” Muriel said. “Can we have lunch first?” she asked plaintively. And they laughed.

# Chapter 23

## Building Inspection (Thursday afternoon)

It was a good thing that Muriel and Ted went back to the site with Frank. Otherwise they wouldn't have found it, it had changed that much. The main building was up, looking very much like something out of a movie. The wings stretched back, behind it, on either side. The architecture was ornate and impressive, almost archaic in style, yet due to the use of three colors of granite had a modern feel. Despite the broad, sweeping steps in front, the entire building was wheelchair accessible. Power was already applied, from its own Envoy style power converter, and the windows blazed with light.

Even the parking lot was ablaze, Seemingly ancient style light poles shed a soft, warm glow over the area that was sufficient to read normal sized newspaper print anywhere in the lot. Parking spaces were well laid out in both length and width to accommodate any normal sized passenger vehicle, including vans. A special area in front of the building was set aside for bus unloading and loading.

Frank departed from them to work on one of the wings as Muriel and Ted walked up the impressive steps to the front door. They were met by a multilingual Envoy impressively dressed in a doorman's uniform that had to have been at least two centuries old in style. He just grinned at their expressions.

"OK, so it's a bit of play acting," he said. "But this is Russia, and there were good things about the culture of the Tzars as well as bad. So, we give them a bit of ego building fantasy. Nobody's hurt by it, and people will be impressed," he said with a sparkle in his eye and a grin on his face. Muriel grinned back.

Inside the doors was a large area broken up into individual and group seating where people could meet and converse in a relaxed atmosphere, complete with servants bringing coffee and tea, or even alcoholic drinks. The ceiling was high, supported by gold flecked columns, and dark, carved wood accented the doorways, chair rails, crown molding and such. At intervals on the walls around the room were carved oak panels depicting scenes from the Russian countryside. And across the back was the reception and information desk – a massive and ornate confection of dark and lighter woods, highly polished and dominating the room. And, behind the counter, was the manager from the American Enclave Guest House.

"No," he said, "I'm not defecting. This is only for the signing and to train someone to take over if the Russians permit. But isn't this a glorious place."

"Would you care to make changes to the Guest House in America?" asked Muriel.

"Hmm. Now that's a question. Maybe," he said. "I'd want to talk to Carla, first. But it does suggest some things. Oh, nothing as outlandish as this. And, of course, I'd pass any

suggestions on to you for your approval, first," he hastened to add.

"Do you really think that's necessary? I trust Carla's judgment. In fact, she's amazing me with the work that she's been turning out, such as the Chinese offices and now this. It's hard to believe that someone I just thought of as a friend should suddenly be so accomplished," Muriel said.

"Oh, she is that," the manager said. "She has one room set up with some of the works from the art gallery in Enclave, like the space-scape that your friend Melanie commissioned. And yes, Melanie knows that a copy is here, and she has no problem with it. She never took out an exclusive request on the work. She wanted others to enjoy the beauty of the work. I expect that we'll have long lines to view it."

"AH! There you are! Isn't this amazing," Sergei said, coming in from the conference room. "Your people are phenomenal, getting this set up so quickly. And so beautiful it is. Something out of the past, yet very much of today. And who is the architect for this?"

"A friend of mine, Sergei," Muriel said. "She and I were in school together. She also does interior design and clothing design. In fact, she took architecture and architectural engineering so she could better understand what to use in her interior design work. I never realized, until recently, that she was capable of such wonders. One of my security squad members is doing the carvings."

"Yes, I have seen. The same one that did the shelf in my office, isn't it?"

"Yep. He's very good. An artisan of a cabinet maker," she replied.

"And is he the one that did the delightful statue in the art gallery?" Sergei asked. "A bit of propaganda, maybe?"

A shiver ran through Muriel at his words. Steve had a copy of the statue she made. He wouldn't have. Would he? Well, she was about to find out, because Sergei was leading her to the gallery even as she thought and wondered.

It was. The same statue, but life sized. Steve had blown it up. "I have a confession, Sergei," she said. "I didn't know this was going to be here. No, Frank didn't do this. Nor did the artist, Steve, whose works are featured here."

"Oh? Then who?"

"Um . . . , " Muriel blushed and paused. "Me."

"Yes, I see that it's you, but who is the young girl, and who created this work of art?"

"Uh, that's what I've been telling you. Me. I did the original. Steve must have made a copy of the one I gave him, and blown it up to full size. And both the figures in it are me. Frank said that I should create from what I know. And, I know me best, so that's what I did. It



was only meant to be a student piece. Something to try out things, and see what worked. So, I put me as I was when I was first trained looking at me as I am now.”

“They are both you?” he said. “I would have thought it was a younger sister. Certainly the resemblance. Both you. Past and present. Each looking at the other and grinning.”

“Look, I can ask Steve to remove it . . . .” Muriel began.

“No.” he said, quietly. Or at least as quietly as his rumbling, deep voice ever got. “No. This is not propaganda, as I first thought. This is a statement. The past leads to the present, and the present looks to the past in order to know the direction of the future. Besides,” he said, lightening up, “it is appropriate here, since you are hosting the event. Russia may be the host country, but it is you and your people that are creating the setting. No, this stays. And if you allow, when the signing is finished, if you turn this property over to Russia, I'd like it to remain.”

“We'd have to talk to Steve. The original statue was only twelve inches tall. So this work, with its randomly blowing hair and plaid, is really his work,” Muriel said. “I see other changes he did, too. Oh nothing that I wouldn't have done had I known how and thought of it. But this is more life-like than the one I did. As far as I'm concerned, it can stay, but we must talk to Steve.”

“Talk to me about what? Is there a problem?”

“Hi, Steve. No, not a problem, a question,” Muriel told him. “Sergei, the President of Russia, would like to keep this statue here, or a copy of it if this is the original.”

“That would be up to you, Muriel. I just blew up your miniature to life size and added the textures and movements. I hope you don't mind,” Steve replied.

“Of course I don't mind. You took a student work – just something that I did to see if I could do it – and made it a masterpiece. That's why you should be the one to say if it stays,” Muriel said.

“No, Muriel. This is only part of the display. I was coming out to add the rest when I heard my name,” Steve said, and moved over to the wall next to the statue. He pulled something out of a 'no pocket' and mounted it to the wall. When he stepped back, there was a plaque and shelf. The plaque said:

*Muriel and Muriel*  
*The Past and the Present*  
*Work by Steve, Envoy of Home*  
*from the original miniature by*  
*Muriel, Leader of Home*

Below the plaque, on the shelf was a copy of Muriel's original statue, and a card saying that copies were available in the Gift Shop.

"I meant no disrespect, Muriel, I hope you don't mind," Steve said.

"No, I don't mind. But you have done so much more, making the figures look almost alive, that it really is a new work. So, you should have the say as to whether it stays or now," Muriel said, softly.

"Oh, well, I don't have a problem with it. I've got the original in this size back at the Gallery. And my manager has insisted that he wants to offer any of your works, there, too. You really captured your personality, both as it was then and as it is now, in the two figures. I remember you from then. And that mischievous, devilish smile of yours, like you were just looking for a way to get into trouble. But you were always kind and friendly. And now, it's more knowing, but still the same smile. Oh, there's so much I see in them. It makes me see more in people that I meet, and suddenly it's like a whole new world has opened up to me," he said.

"Hmm," Muriel said. "You know? I think I've got an idea. We've been looking for something to use as souvenirs for people who come to the American Enclave. It's not really artistic, but maybe more exacting. Action figures. People have heard the stories about my friends and I, and the things we did when we first got here. So, action figures that kids can use to act out some of the things. After all, we're angling for kids, anyway. Steve, I wonder if you'd show me how to do that texture trick. Oh, and the breeze, too."

"Oh, both are easy," he said, and transferred the information to her directly by mental link.

"Thanks. Sergei, you've got your statue, one way or another. Now," she said, "I have a question for you. Are we allowed to recruit and train?"

"Good grief! That's direct, even for you. Yes, of course. But what brought that up?"

"I smell a mind that's ready to pop," Muriel said. "I didn't realize that you were allowing people in while construction was going on, or I'd have been better prepared. So, I'll just have to find my opportunity as I can. Forgive me if I break loose in a hurry and without notice."

"OK, you're forgiven," he replied.

"Steve, you've done a marvelous job on that statue, as usual. All your work is good, and thank you for the training on how to improve my little daubs," Muriel said, keeping and eye on the room beyond the short hall.

She wasn't disappointed. Four people appeared around the corner – an Envoy, two adults, male and female, and a young girl, maybe eleven or twelve. The girl stopped, and grabbed her mother's arm. "It's her!" she whispered to her mother. Muriel had no trouble picking up the words, though.

"Nonsense, honey, what would she be doing here. Probably just an Envoy that looks something like her," her mother said.

"Uh, uh," the girl replied. "I KNOW it's her. It's the lady in the statue."

"Time for my performance, guys. Let me through please," Muriel said, and she walked toward the girl. As she approached, she switched from the Class 'A' uniform she had been wearing to the 'fighting formals' that the statue wore, all the while holding the girl's eyes to make sure she saw the change. Then she added a bit of a glow.

"Actually, she's right, you know," Muriel said, glancing up at the woman, briefly. "Hello, my name is Muriel. What's yours?"

"Anastasiya," the girl replied. "My mother and father just call me Anna."

"And what do YOU like to be called," Muriel said, and the mischievous, devilish grin spread across her face.

The girl grinned back in an impish way. "Anna is fine. I'm not old enough to be an Anastasiya, yet. You're glowing. But you're not an Envoy. Your glow is gray, where theirs is white."

"Anna, that's no way to talk to the lady!" her mother exclaimed.

"Ah, but it is. What she's doing is seeing souls. Envoys are soul, so they glow, normally. I'm human, so I have to push it a little for most people to see it. Just a little, in this case, because your daughter is very sharp eyed," Muriel said, directly to the mother. "And mine is gray because I'm human. I'd like to speak to you and your husband, and your daughter, if I may," she added, taking direct control of the conversation. "Why don't we go over here to these seats where we won't be disturbed." And she turned and headed directly toward them.

::Ted, could you do me a favor? Check and see if the Gift Shop has any of those statues, and bring one, please?::

::They do,:: he replied, after a moment. ::And they're boxed in 'presentation boxes' that double as packaging for travel. Be right there.::

::Don? Are you doing anything important right now?::

::Nothing that can't wait. Baseball bat?:: he asked.

::Yep. I've got a live one. Something like what Taylor was,:: Muriel said as she sat down.

::OH, JOY!:: Don replied, sarcastically. ::What IS it with you and young kids. By the

way, did you get permission to recruit?::

::Yep. So your event and activities are on::

::GOOD! Now talk to the nice people and get them jollied up::

"Now, first of all," Muriel said to Anna's parents, "your daughter has what some people call a talent. We just call it an ability. Most people are born with it, and lose it as they grow up and hear that 'oh, there's no such thing as that.' I'm here to tell you that there is. And, she's at the age where it's growing. There's no way, once it's started, to take it away from her. But there is a way to teach her to control it. In the process, it can help protect her and give her the ability to call for help no matter where she is."

A bell rang, attracting the attention of Anna and her parents, and Ted translated in holding a box. He brought it to Muriel, from behind her, totally ignoring the stares he was receiving from the Russian family.

Without looking, she said, "Thanks Ted. Now then," she said to the parents, "protection . . . ." And Don translated in, swinging his bat. "And thank you, Don. Oh, how's Fran?"

"She's fine. Very fine," he said with a grin. Muriel grinned back at him at the inside joke.

"As you can see, the bat never touched me because of my personal shield. And Ted showed you what translating is like. Both of those take power. But to get the power, you have to be able to take the training. That's what we offer." Don took his bat back, and Muriel took the box over to Anna. "I thought you might like this," she said, opening it up. The one on the right is me, as you knew. The one on the left is also me. Me just after I'd been trained, and before we got the nifty new uniforms. Me, looking at the future – or at least at the idea of the future. And the future looking back, remembering where I came from – the base on which I build a future future. And they're both walking toward that future future. And I'm offering you a future." She handed the box to Anna, then looked at her parents. "If you will allow us to train her."

"How . . . how long must she be away?" asked Anna's father.

"The training takes from a half day to four days, depending on the person. And she doesn't need to be away from you at all. No indoctrination. No esoteric rites. No long stays away from her family that loves her. I'll take that back. If she can complete the training, then the last part will take her away for about fifteen minutes. That's when she makes a trip to Home and back. Oh, it can take less. That's the longest it's ever taken."

Husband and wife looked at each other. Finally, the wife asked, "What happens if she doesn't get the training?"

"Then she starts hearing voices in her head. What she'll actually be hearing is the

thoughts of other people. But without the training, and the power to sustain mental activity, she won't be able to block them out. Eventually, it can drive a person crazy, because she'll be hearing everybody's thoughts for miles around, all at the same time. Like being in a crowd that's constantly screaming at you," Muriel replied. "I'm asking for YOUR permission because she's under age. This isn't something that someone can order another person to take. The person has to want to take the training. But, because she's underage, you two have to also give permission."

Again, Anna's parents looked at each other. That special, telling look that some parents can do that speaks volumes without saying a word. Finally, Anna's father said, "Yes. We give our permission." And his wife nodded agreement.

## Chapter 24

### "It's Going to Be a Long Night" (Thursday late afternoon)

"Anna? It's up to you. I can't force you or order you. Neither can your parents. It has to be your choice," Muriel said.

"Can I ask a question?"

"Of course you can. As many as you need to make an informed decision," Muriel replied, shocked that she hadn't made that clear before. She tried to make her words as soothing and sincere as she could.

"Um . . . will I be like you?" Anna asked. Ted started laughing, and Don hit him.

"Anna," Don said, "Ted isn't laughing at you. He's laughing at the fact that you sound like Muriel did at your age, or thereabouts. How old are you, anyway?"

"I'm eleven," she replied. "Do I really sound like her?"

"Muriel was quite capable of asking that sort of question. I know. We were friends back then. Still are, actually. I was one of the group that she brought out of that school and trained. Twelve of us at once. And we were all twelve years old," Don said with sincerity and good humor. "She was our leader. The one that kept us together and tried to protect us. So, how many do you have looking to you?"

"Eight, I think," Anna said.

"There's another reason I was laughing," Ted said. "And it did have to do with you, but not in any negative way. Muriel is the Leader of the People of Home – the Envoys. She keeps saying that she's just going her own way and they keep chasing her. The thought of another one like her . . . well, let's just say that I'm not sure the world's ready for that, yet."

"Oh. I didn't mean would I be a Leader of Home. Just, could I do the sorts of things that she does," Anna said, a little embarrassed.

"Yes," Muriel said, emphatically. "Maybe more. I've trained a lot of people that have ended up in important positions. And your age isn't a barrier to that. I was twelve when I was facing down the President of the United States, and all sorts of business, religious and media leaders."

Anna looked thoughtful for a moment, then said, "I want to take the training. If I can."

"OK, there's a test that we give to see if someone can be trained. For you, it'll be a

formality. We're going to play a little game. You see how far away I am from you? I'm too far away for you to touch with your hand. But, your mind has a hand, too. So, look at me, see where I am, then close your eyes and reach out and touch my shoulder and say 'hi'," Muriel said.

Immediately, Muriel felt a touch and heard, ::Hi, Muriel.:: Anna hadn't even closed her eyes.

::Hi, Anna. Yes, you can be trained,:: she replied. And Anna's face lit up like a lantern.

"Now, enough mental sending until you've got the power to sustain it," Muriel said, softening the almost harsh order with her quiet voice and smile to her new charge. "And we can't help you find power and learn shields without a little help."

A small figure walked into the room, wearing a neutral gray and unadorned version of the Russian military uniform, including high riding boots but scaled for an eleven year old girl. "Will I do? My name is Nika" – she pronounced it as NEEkah – "and I'd like to be Anastasiya's friend."

"An Envoy for a friend?" Anna asked.

"Why not," said Muriel, "I have a couple dozen of them. Now, we can do this the easy way or the fast way. The fast way is something new, and a bit of a shock to the student at first. But ends up being much better than the way we had been teaching the basics. Which would you prefer?"

"Let's try the fast way, then," Anna replied. And Muriel went into her spiel concerning Envoy souls and human bodies. She only got partway through – just the overview of the subject – when Anna started shaking. This went on for a minute, while Muriel assured her parents that she was actually all right. Then it suddenly stopped.

Anna opened her eyes and looked at Muriel. "It's OK. I know who I am. And who I was. And I'm connected to power. Wow! Am I connected. Shields. Yes, I have the pattern you use." She stood up and looked thoughtful for a minute. Then said, "Don? Would you please? I'll even close my eyes so I won't see it coming."

Don stood up and swung the bat. And it stopped a foot from the girl. Anna's mother's eyes were wide with shock. As were her father's, but he had a bit more composure and came over to the girl and asked if she was all right.

"Yes, pa," she replied. He then walked around her, looking at the bat and at her, and seeing the distance between. Then, he showed where she got at least some of her intelligence from, and Muriel covered her mouth to hide the laughter. He reached PAST the bat, still stuck in her shield, and touched her on the shoulder.

"You see, pa. It lets in what I want in, and keeps out whatever would harm me. And the way Muriel has patterned it, I'm always anchored so I can't be grabbed," Anna said. "And

I should probably give Don back his bat.”

“No need,” Don said catching her eye where she could see both him and the bat. Then he drew it out of his 'no pocket' and the one attached to her shield disappeared.

“My turn, I think,” said Nika. “Unless any of you are familiar with young girl's fashions and likes and dislikes.”

“Well, the fashion part I think I can do,” said Carla from behind her. “And she can always tell us her likes and dislikes. It couldn't hurt to have two of us help her.”

“Or three,” said Muriel. “But I'm going to change up the order. She can always learn to make clothes. But I want her a full Citizen of Home before anything else, right now. I have my reasons, and I'll explain later. We need to make sure she can translate safely on earth, and show her the twist to translate to Home and back.”

“Why the change in your pattern, Muriel?” asked Don.

“A feeling. Nothing more than that. A feeling that we need her to know her balance as soon as possible. And another feeling – that for Anna, clothing to distinguish her won't be as important to her as the self-knowledge,” Muriel replied. “Carla, are the suites, upstairs, empty?”

“Yes. We finished them yesterday,” Carla replied. “OH! You want to use them to start with translating places on earth.”

“Yep. Her last move will be back down here, where there's people wandering around. Then from here to Home and back. THEN, if nothing's happened to interrupt us, back upstairs to teach her about clothes,” Muriel said.

And so it went. In fifteen minutes the family was back in the main reception area, discussing clothing with Nika and Anna. Carla would pass images of styles to Nika, who would promptly create them, grinning all the while, and Muriel would answer questions from Anna about ways to change them to make them distinctive and attractive. Then, the family was translated back upstairs to the suite that Muriel would be occupying, and Don and Ted took Anna's father off to let the women do their work. Another fifteen minutes, and a lot of giggling coming from the bedroom, and Anna was back out, wearing something like an archaic Russian costume, but with an orange belted tunic over gray pants with an orange stripe down the outside seam of the legs. Nika, meanwhile, had switched hers to a faded version of Anna's uniform.

“It isn't for all the time, pa,” Anna said. “Mostly, for when I'm doing something that's definitely for Home and the Envoys.” And she pulled a green passport out of a no pocket and showed it to him. On the cover was the word 'Diplomat', and inside was the certification of her being an Ambassador.

“Ted,” Muriel interrupted, “we have a problem. I've wondered the past couple of years,



and now I'm sure. We're getting more 'breakthrough' children – kids that are either beginning to see souls or beginning to hear thoughts of others. Somehow, we need to alert the leaders of countries to look out for them and get them to us. It's only happenstance that had Anna and her parents here, wondering if they could see what was going on, and they found an Envoy that recognized the situation and brought them in.”

“So, what can we do about it?” asked Ted.

“I don't know,” she replied. “I was hoping you had a suggestion.”

“Well, I'll think about it. That's all I can promise,” he said. “So, what are you going to do, now?”

“Two things,” Muriel said. “First is introduce Sergei to the latest Ambassador from Home. And second, see if we can get her and her parents registered as guests, here, so I can continue to work with her for a bit. We'll need squads for her, too, and a place to use as her office. Oh, not here, unless Sergei decides to use this as part of an Enclave. But she will need an office.”

“You're pushing him,” Ted said.

“Yes and no,” she said. “I'll push for the office. I won't insist on an actual Enclave. Yet. And whether his government accepts her as an Ambassador or not will be up to him and his government.”

“Think he'll buy it?”

“I think he'll first balk at the fact that she's so young. But, in actuality, she's just short of her twelfth birthday. So she's about the same age I was when I became an Ambassador,” Muriel replied. “And he KNOWS what I've done and been through. And, I think if he understands that she'll be under my supervision, he'll accept it.”

It was at that moment that Sergei and Steve came out of the gallery. Sergei stopped dead and stared at Anna for a moment. Then said, “You, young lady. You were the one that realized that Muriel was the one in the statue.” He said it as a declaration and not a question.

“Yes, sir,” Anna replied.

“Come. We will talk,” Sergei said, and angled off to a set of seats far enough away that they wouldn't be overheard. Anna followed, and soon they were seated. Sergei was obviously asking questions, and Anna was just as obviously answering. Sometimes short, with the nod of a head. Sometimes longer, with animated hands and body. And once, she changed from the new, orange uniform to the clothes she'd been wearing, and back again. It was when she pulled her passport out of her 'no pocket' that Muriel knew the jig was up, and prepared for an explosion. But none came, unless you count Sergei's whole-hearted and LOUD laughter at seeing it.

"Muriel," he said, loudly, as they returned, "you have an Ambassador for me, and no place to put her!"

"That can be remedied," Muriel replied, leaving the method of remedy open to discussion.

"And just how would you go about remedying it?" asked Sergei. "You've been allowed to train people, here. But nothing has been said about building an Enclave."

"I'm not talking Enclave. Yet," said Muriel. "And I won't until you're ready to listen. But the girl will need an office. So . . . Home buys the land for it, pays the taxes for one hundred years IN ADVANCE, and puts up an office. It would make it easier if your government could see it's way clear to accept her as an Ambassador, by the way. But, whether or not, she is one from our point of view. So, we provide the utilities, like power and water and sewage. We provide the staff for the office, and she's always in contact with me so that she's not stepping on anyone's toes. And, if you like, she can be in contact with you, despite your horrid phone system."

"You talk about buying the land. Not us giving it to you, and expecting us to provide the utilities?"

"Sergei, we're not asking you or your government to be out of pocket for any of it. It's how we run the Enclaves in all the countries we're in. Ask Taylor about Britain. Ask any of the other country leaders about how we operate," Muriel said, calmly and quietly, slipping in how Enclaves were run, she thought, was a good idea.

"Hmm. No cost to us. But how much would you change our culture – our society?"

"Well, I'd say that depends on you," Muriel replied. "Certainly, we don't want to change the way ordinary people live and work. But you know that I know that you have troubles. Not all of the organized criminal element has been tracked down, yet. And then there's the ones that think that terrorism is the way to affect changes that put them on top. And we've always been open to helping you with those problems."

"Yes," he said, "as long as we contract with you."

"OH! GAD! So, that's the sticking point. I should have known. Sergei, it's not a contract that costs you any money. Ted, do you have a copy of the one we have with America?"

"Yes, sure," he said, handing over the treaty with the United States government. Muriel paged through it a bit, then found the spot and showed it to Sergei.

"This is the contract. It's part of the treaty we have with the United States of America. That we can be called on in emergencies – can even act on our own volition under certain circumstances – to perform certain specific activities including intelligence gathering, rescue and aid in cases of natural and unnatural disasters great and small, apprehension of criminals

at your request. Things like that. THAT'S the contract. The treaty with your country. But it takes an Ambassador on our part to administer and take action. Nothing less. Someone that we trust to act on his or her own in ways that are compatible with the philosophy of Home, and smart enough to holler for help when he or she is in over their head."

"Ambassador Anastasiya, have you read this document?" asked Sergei.

"No, Mister President. Muriel felt that I should wait to read the treaty with Russia, instead, so I wouldn't be confused," she replied.

"So formal?"

"As long as you continue to inflict my title and full name on me, yes," she replied. "I'm Anna." Sergei's eyebrows nearly met his hairline, and considering his age and his proceeding forehead, that distance was considerable.

"Very well, Anna," he replied. "In that case, I'm Sergei, and age differences can go hang." And, when Anna started giggling with merriment over that, he joined in readily, with his loud laugh. And Muriel simply felt relieved that another hurdle had been passed. Her parents just looked astonished. Shocked, even.

"Ah, Anna," Sergei finally said, when he calmed down. "I can see that this is going to be interesting. In any case, if you trust Muriel and Ted, then I will ask them to draw something up that I can present to the government." Ted quietly pulled something out of a 'no pocket' and handed it to the man. "What's this?" Sergei asked, then looked, and started laughing all over again. It was a Russian version of the treaty, outlining all the things that were in the American one. "You . . .," he sputtered, shaking a finger at Muriel, "you will be the death of me, yet. You had this planned!"

"Not at all, Sergei. However, that's not to say that we couldn't hope. And, in our hope, have things prepared so we could act quickly," she said, with a laugh of her own.

# Chapter 25

## A Bargain is Set

(Thursday early evening)

"Well, Miss Muriel that is a constant nag, even when she isn't nagging, you've got your wish. It may take a while to get those doddering old fools to accept it, but we will make a treaty with you, and you can have your Enclave, here," Sergei said. "And you, little Miss Anna, that is eleven going on forty, I expect that you will head it. We will have to find a place for you to have an office, until such time as this treaty is signed and an Enclave can be built for you, though. Muriel, is there any chance that some corner could be found for her, here?"

"Guest House Envoys, Plan A," Carla said and sent. Which simply served to set Sergei off again. "Your office, Anna, until the Enclave is built, will be through that door. And in about fifteen minutes, I'll happily take you there and show it to you. They should have it finished by then. Then you can make suggestions and changes to suit yourself, and my crew will make it right for you."

"You, young lady, are as bad as Muriel," Sergei said.

"Of course. We've been friends for a long time. Even before the training. Where else would I get it from," Carla said, grinning at him.

"Now, Sergei, about this building," Muriel started.

"You want to use it as part of the Enclave," he said as a statement.

"No," Muriel said adamantly. "Our bargain was that, after the signing, it would be turned over to you as a resort. I keep my bargains. However, I would like to offer you something else, as a gift. We'll leave the Envoys in place to run it. Oh, they can change into something suitably Russian for clothing. But the service and the prices would remain the same. Essentially, the Guest House side and the Visitors side are the same, or will be once Anna is ensconced in her own Enclave. You'd be getting a small, steady income from the place without any outlay in expenses."

"Hmm. No, I don't think so," Sergei said, thinking out loud. "Or, at least, not completely. The area beyond this building is unused, and beyond it is nothing. I'll see who owns what, and see that it's made available for you to purchase. You already bought this land. Leave this outside of the Enclave proper, and leave the Guest House side for the Guests of that Enclave. It would be part of Enclave, as far as the treaty and legalities go, but more accessible to the people because it would be outside the walls."

"Really. Sergei, I smell 'self interest' in this. I just don't know what your interest is," Muriel said. "And that tends to make me suspicious. So . . . why am I so suddenly suspicious? Why would I even consider that, somehow, you're trying to get the better of an

already one sided deal where the benefit is all to you, already? Well? What's in it for us? And what for you?"

"For you? Enclave, as soon as the signing is over, and you can build it. For me? I know who owns the land, because I do. And it's been useless to me, what with the turn of the economy. Also, it puts this delightful little creature that talks like an old man near to me where I can learn from her. Does that satisfy you?" Sergei asked.

"Sergei," Anna said, "you'd have guest right no matter where an Enclave was built. And no matter whether you were President or not. But how are you going to get the government to accept the treaty?"

"That, young lady, is a very good question," Sergei said. "I know that some of them are connected to the criminal element in this poor country. And they are using every coercive trick to keep others in line. I don't think that they're going to like having an Enclave here. In fact, I can't imagine why this place hasn't had a visit from them, already, trying to make demands and take over."

"Well, Sergei," Muriel said, "that will be . . . interesting . . . to see. We have this tendency to not treat bullies very well. And rest assured that, should they show up, I'll be called. And I WILL deal with them. I'll even be nice and turn them over to your law enforcement when I get through with them," she said, grinning.

"You know, Muriel, I've heard that sharks smile like that. Just before they bite," he said, and they both laughed.

"Anna," Muriel changed the subject, "I've tried to give this to you a couple of times, and each time we've gotten involved in something else. I don't know that it would mean as much to you, now, as it would have before you got trained, but since you expressed an interest . . . , " and she handed the girl the box that Ted had gotten from the Gift Shop.

Anna took the box and set it on her lap, looking at the ornate carving on the face of it, trying to decipher the words, written in English, on the face of it. Then, her fingers found the catch on the side and she opened it up. And there was a copy of the original statue that Muriel had made.

Don came over and sat beside her. "This might help," he said, catching her eye. He held it for five minutes, then she looked again at the front of the box.

"Oh! It's like that sign beside the bigger one. And it's in English! Wait! I don't know English," she said.

"Then why are you speaking it?" asked Don with a smile.

"I am?" she asked, then answered herself, "I AM! Oh, my. My teachers in school will never believe this."

"They'll believe it," Don said. "They'll have to, when you test out at being caught up to your grade, and advanced three grades beyond it. It'll take a couple of days to fully unfold, but you've got that much time before you go back to school. And Nika . . . did I pronounce that right?" at a nod and smile from the Envoy, he continued, "Nika knows how to add to it every two to four weeks. We've got a course set up for you that will help you be comfortable being a manager and administrator. Oh, and Ambassador. And, in a couple of months, you can start considering what else you might need."

"Plus, Nika knows what the job of security chief entails, which means that she knows it involves being an organizer for you, and a major support," Muriel said. "We don't expect you to know everything and do everything. That's what your security chief and squads are for. Squads!" Muriel suddenly said, "did we forget to set up squads for her? I'll forget my own name, next."

"It's Muriel," Mata said, translating in. "And her squads are waiting for her in her office." Muriel hit her, and they both grinned. "Seriously, when I realized what you were doing I got some volunteers and crammed Russian culture and such into them. They worked with Carla on the office. I've seen it. I think she'll like it, but the final decision is up to her, of course. Come see!" she said, and translated back out.

"Well, since she didn't give me an image, I suppose we walk," Muriel said.

"Oh, poor baby," Don said. "Having to walk all the way across this room." He'd gathered up Anna's parents, who still seemed to be in a state of shock over the speed that everything had happened. "It gets easier," he said to them. "Honest. It was a shock to Muriel's parents, too, at first. And now they live in the Enclave in America and are having the time of their life. I think you'd like them. They're good people."

"Muriel, can I ask you a question?" Anna asked.

"Of course. That's what I'm here for."

"I've got some friends . . .," Anna started. "Um, I'm pretty sure they can do it. I mean, we've been making mental contact for about a year, now. Not long. It hurt too much."

"And you want to know if you're allowed to train them," Muriel said. "Of course you are."

"ME! I just wanted to know if they could be trained! I didn't mean ME train them."

"Why not?" Muriel asked. "You can do it. Nika knows both ways to train, and she'll be right there with you to help. So will your squads. Anna, humans have to be trained, or connected. Envoys ARE the training. And they've kept up with all the improvements I've made over the years. Trust yourself. And trust Nika."

By this time, they'd reached the new doors to Anna's office. Muriel should have realized when she saw that the entire front of the office was glass, including the doors. But

she didn't. And whoosh doors claimed not only Anna as a victim, but Muriel.

"WHOA!" said Anna. "Do they always do that?"

"Yep," Muriel replied, laughing. "And I should have realized when I saw them. They are guaranteed not to be in your way when you want to go through them. They stay open as long as someone's in the sensor beam, and close slowly. They also do a nice job of intimidating people coming to your office."

"Hmm. I'll have to think about that. Unlike many countries, Russia has experienced too much intimidation of ordinary people. At least, that's my opinion. I wonder if there's a way to set it up so that the doors open at a speed that allows a person to just walk in without stopping or slowing," Anna said.

"A variable speed system based on a person's speed toward the doors?" asked Muriel.

"Yes! Something like that."

"On it," said Doug, from inside the office. Noted mostly for electrical work, Muriel's squad member actually did electronic engineering, too, for most simple systems. "If I can't figure out a way, I'll talk to Jeff. HE knows everything," Doug said with a laugh.

As they pass through the doors, Anna stopped and stared. "This is for me?"

"Yup," said Muriel. "It's based off a heavily modified version of what I came up with four years ago. Feel free to make any changes that would make you more comfortable. There's nothing that says that you HAVE to keep it this way."

To Anna's left was her formal office and casual area. A massive, highly polished dark wood desk dominated the area, overlooking the casual area in front of it. The casual space was larger than Muriel was used to, with more seating capability. And behind the desk, a rocking and swiveling chair that would put any throne to shame. To the right was the on duty squad area, set up like Chun's, facing the formal office. Centered between was a desk for Nika, smaller and less ornate than Anna's, but not by much. Computers abounded. And so did the sense of Russia, in the form of carved wall panels and general architecture.

"Muriel, can I make a change?" asked Anna. "Well, actually two changes. A glass wall between my formal area and the break room, and turn my desk so it's angled out from the corner."

"Sure." Muriel moved the chairs and desk as she suggested, and erected a 'glass' wall. The wall was actually a transparent shield that looked and felt like glass, but was unbreakable.

She had absolutely no problem with the break room and kitchen, especially when she found out that this office would be duplicated in her Enclave when it was built. But she didn't understand why there were so many seats.

"You'll have four squads of five Envoys, each," Muriel said. "If they're anything like mine were, they'll stay here almost constantly, especially when you're here, at first. Part of that is so they can get used to you and you to them. They will each have a specialty skill, or even more than one. They also will have very different personalities. These are people that you can make friends with, kid with, treat like they're 'older brothers and sisters'. They're a whole new family for you. Not to displace your parents, but to give you a wider range of friendship and affection. Now," she added, "don't feel that you HAVE to have individual ones. If you just can't get along with them for what ever reason, say something. We can make changes. And they'll understand, and not think any less of you."

"There's a reason for that, isn't there," said Anna.

"Yes. In time, and without you even noticing it happening, you'll mesh with them," Muriel said. "You'll find that when you suggest doing something, that someone's already realized the need and acted on it. Or, should you actually have to go into action, it'll take very little guidance on your part and they'll just be in the right place at the right time, doing what needs to be done."

"That can happen?" asked Anna.

"Oh, yes," Muriel replied. "You saw some of it in action, today. People popping in and out, getting things done, often on just a word, because they know me well enough to know what I want done. And likewise, I know them well enough to know who to call on for a specific task. It's like a low level version of the mesh mind. And when we go into full blown mesh mind, we don't even talk very much. Each knows what the other is doing and what else needs to be done. We even have a game we play that uses it, and I'll tell you, the action is FAST in that."

"Squads coming in," Mata said, and four squads of mixed kids and adults in the muted colors that Nika wore casually walked into the office. "Oh, and Muriel? We've got to change the document recognizing the Enclave of China. Every country that has an Enclave has asked to sign it. Except Russia. And Sergei's working on that. So, we need to increase the signing area of the document. Ted knows, and says that it'll be ready, and we'll make copies on the spot for each of the country leaders to take back with them."

As Mata was talking, the squad leaders introduced themselves to Anna. And Anna was charmed by the fact that half the squads appeared to be her age, and that all the squads were mixed male and female. There was a lot of grinning going on. The squads, themselves, moved directly to the break room area, except for one that took up station at the on-duty desks. And somebody started popping popcorn. Muriel's stomach growled.

A giggle from beside her turned out to be Anna's mother. "You really are human," she said.

"Yep. All the way through," said Muriel with a grin.



"Well," Anna's mother said, "that just put things into perspective for me. Anna is still human and my daughter."

"Of course she is," replied Muriel. "And she'll be going home with you and go on being a daughter. This? This is a bit of responsibility for her to grow into. Nika will take most of the load, especially at first, just like Mata did for me and still does. Mata's my organizer, which means that when something happens she often already knows what it is and what needs to be done, and lets me know where I'm needed. Nika will be the same way. Trust me, we aren't expecting a super adult right off the bat."

"So, what will she be doing?" Anna's mother asked.

"Mostly? Meeting people, explaining who and what Envoys are, and what services we offer, particularly the free ones like education for those that have taken the training. Working with businesses to show them how they can improve their products and their profits. Explaining to politicians that there really is such a thing as ethics, and that they really shouldn't weight legislature in favor of one group or another," Muriel replied. "And through all that, she can and probably will ask questions or holler for help. And that's fine. First, because we DON'T expect her to know everything. And second because asking questions is part of how people learn."

"Can I ask . . . do you live with your parents?"

"No," Muriel said gently. "Oh, I visit as often as I can, and very often stay in their home on weekends. We're close. In fact, closer now than before I was trained. I have an apartment over my office. And my parents live inside Enclave, in a house that was specifically built to duplicate the house we had back then. However, they didn't throw me out, nor did I leave because I felt unwanted or unappreciated. There were other factors involved. You can ask them, when you see them. And I know what you're thinking, 'Now that Anna's an Ambassador is she going to be too busy to come home, or not want to come home.' I doubt it. She looks to both of you for acceptance, affection and support. I expect that she always will. What she's doing will be a job, and she'll get paid for it – in an account for her for when she reaches her age of maturity."

"She'll be paid?"

"Of course. As an Ambassador of Home, she's employed by Home. And if there's any additional – any maintenance we need to cover with you – let us know and we'll take care of it," Muriel said. "And now, I should probably get going. It's past when I usually have dinner, and if I don't do something about it and my mother hears my stomach growl, she'll be after me to know when I'm going to feed the beast. I'm surprised she hasn't shown up, already."

"She has," said Lily. "I was just being polite and waiting for an opportunity. Unlike some daughters I know."

"Oh? You have more than one? I didn't know that," Muriel said with a grin, and hugged her mother.

“At least you appear to be putting your time to good use, and not just gadding about,” Lily said. “A new one, huh?”

“Yep. Leaking like a sieve, and seeing souls. It's been worth the delay. Both for herself and because it pushed Sergei a bit. We'll have an Enclave, here,” Muriel said. “Sergei. I should let Sergei know that I'm going. Oh, and Anna. She should come back with me. Her parents too, of course. There are still things she needs to know.”

“Like what? I thought it was all done up in the training,” her mother said.

“Like 'don't let Sergei buffalo you. Don't let him think that you're less than you are – the representative of the Leader of Home'. She needs to feel it in her bones,” Muriel said. “It's not an easy thing to learn.”

“You managed it,” her mother said.

“Yes. But I had rage. Anna just has innocence. So, I need to lend her some spine until she finds her own,” Muriel said.

## Chapter 26

A Tale is Told  
(Thursday late evening)

Sergei led Anna away from the others, far enough that they wouldn't hear their discussion. They sat down, facing each other, and each waited for the other to start. Sergei, it seemed, was at a loss for where to begin with one so young – he that had browbeat and intimidated politicians on his way up to the presidency was at a loss for words when faced with an eleven year old girl.

“Mister President,” Anna said, beating him to the punch, “there's something you should know about me. And it's not something that everyone in the world needs to know. There is a part of me that is millions of years old, and quite cynical. So, despite the fact that I was brought up to respect my elders and authority, you're apt to find me tougher than Muriel.”

“Oh? And why is that?” he asked.

“Because I know, beyond any belief – beyond any doubt, where my soul came from,” she replied. “Envoys are soul. Nothing more than intelligent power. Humans are soul in a body. WHERE DID THE SOUL COME FROM?” Even in a quiet voice, he could hear the capital letters slam into place, her intensity was that great.

“Are you trying to tell me that you're an Envoy in a human body?”

“I'm not trying, because I don't have to try. And reality does not depend on your belief,” she replied. “I am an Envoy. I didn't know it until Muriel awakened me, or re-connected me, or whatever description you choose to use. In most matters, the human child you see is dominant. BUT – the Envoy is still there, with the experience of past lives to support it in helping the human girl to cope with this job I've been given.”

“And how does that affect me?” he asked.

“You brought me aside to try to intimidate me in some way, so that you could feel that you won something. You tried this with Muriel. How'd that work out for you?”

“It didn't. She put me down so thoroughly that I haven't dared repeat it. And then she went and did what needed to be done, to do exactly what I wanted. But it was HER doing it, not me telling her she had to do it,” he replied.

“In other words, trying to intimidate her didn't work, and you were forced to deal with her as an equal,” Anna said.

“Well, yes.”

“I’m no different. I may not have the experience in this life that she has. But she doesn’t have the experience of past lives that I do. And we are both Envoys at base. So, Mister President, I expect you to deal with me as an adult. DON’T try to fluster me. DON’T try to out fox me. DON’T try to bully me. You’ll have me to answer to. Then you’ll have Muriel to answer to. And she’s more ruthless than I am,” Anna said. “Are we clear on that?”

And Sergei roared with laughter, his deep, booming voice echoing off the distant walls and filling the space with mirth. Anna joined him in laughing. She knew – as he did – that she’d beat him at his own game, and had the force to back it up.

“Well, youngling, since it is to be that way, you should do as your mentor does and call me Sergei,” he finally said.

“Good! And you will call me Anna. Oh, there are formal times when we will trot out the titles, for the benefit of others. But between us, we’re just Sergei and Anna. Friends that try to find a way, through complex human rules, to get the job done.”

“Well said. Very well said, and I accept your friendship and offer mine. I don’t think I’ve ever had this much fun, and to think it was because I was being told off for a fool,” he said.

“Well, no. Not a fool. Just a man, and a politician,” Anna said with a smile. “And, as proof of what I say . . . ,” and she changed clothes, flipping through a couple of changes to show that she could do the same as Muriel. Then she pulled her passport out of her ‘no pocket’ and handed it to him. Around his side, she could see Muriel tense.

Then Sergei laughed again, and said, “We will have to play this for our audience, you know.”

“Yes, well kids are good at hoodwinking adults,” Anna said. And Sergei was still laughing as he led her back to her parents, Ted and Muriel.

“And that’s how it went,” Anna concluded her story.

“Well done!” Muriel said, settling back in her recliner. Anna’s father was just shaking his head, and her mother looked shocked. “You did exactly right. You pulled his teeth before he had a chance to use them. I would have had to just out-bully him.”

“Yes, well that’s because you only have one human life to draw on. I’ve got hundreds,” Anna replied. “And it helps that I look young and innocent and female.”

“Hmm. Well, the times I tried that it just seemed to encourage idiots to try to walk all over me,” Muriel said.

“Oh, I didn’t say that I ACT young and innocent and female,” Anna retorted. “After all, I did threaten him that he’d have to answer to me. And then to you, and you’re more ruthless,”

and they both laughed.

“Anna, part of the reason I asked you to come here, tonight was to give you confidence in handling other people and in translating. But a bigger part was so that you’ve got another safe place to go to. And you’re welcome here, any time,” Muriel said. “Just remember that you ARE nearly halfway around the world, and I may be sleeping. Of course, getting me up isn’t a problem. Just that you might have to wait a minute while I try to focus.”

“OK,” Anna replied. “I’ll try to schedule my emergencies twenty four hours in advance, then.” she said, and snickered. “By the way, I can see why you said that all the Ambassadors’ offices are modeled after this one. Seeing this one, and comparing it to mine, I can see the flexibility of the design. Plus, of course, the ability to decorate according to one’s taste. And you say you live here?”

“My apartment is upstairs,” Muriel said. “Oh, I COULD live down here. The recliner flattens out into a very comfortable bed. Same for the ones in the break room. And I can always turn the window opaque, and put up temporary walls around the area. I’ve done it a couple of times, when things were happening and I felt that I needed to be here in case things went south in a hurry. I haven’t done that in years, though. Mata knows how to wake me if I’m needed, and is allowed into my apartment without my having to bring her in. So are any of my squads, for that matter. Otherwise, I’d probably starve.”

“Why’s that?” asked Anna.

“I have a kitchen, up there, that I’m not allowed to use. One or two of the squad will be up there making breakfast when I wake up. Lunch is usually down here. Dinner is either up there or at a restaurant, and again I’m not allowed to cook. Even snacks – they’ve got me well trained. I only have to ask, and somebody’s there with what I want,” Muriel said. “As a result, I’ve never really learned how to cook. Or how to create food.”

“You said that Ted was originally THE Leader of Home. Then you took over. Could that happen again?” asked Anna.

“Oh, yes. Easily. Someone with consistently better ideas than I have would find that everyone would be following them. And it would go the same way it did with Ted and I,” Muriel said. “Oh, I see what you mean. No, I wouldn’t be deserted. I’d still be an Ambassador – I’d still have a job to do. I’d even still have this office and my apartment. It’s just that I’d be following someone else instead of being the one that had to come up with the bright ideas. The ultimate democracy, in a way. There’s no politics involved with the job, nor any inheritance of the position. There’s no voting, like in this country.”

“But, couldn’t that cause a split? I mean, if two people are going in different directions?” asked Anna.

“In theory, I suppose it could. In actuality, well, it has happened. But the individuals involved were not broadly supported or numerous, nor were they out for the good of everyone. They wanted a return to what could never again be,” Muriel said.

“So, what happened to them?”

“Ultimately, they had to be destroyed. They were actively trying to kill off the human race. We did manage to save two of them. One is now the head of the hospice we have here. The other is sitting right over there, head of my analysis section, and having a blast,” Muriel said. “The ones we killed were responsible for a lot of the crime and turmoil in the world. Their behavior would have ended up with the end of the Envoys, too.”

“Didn't other Envoys object to your taking action like that?” asked Anna.

“Nope. In fact, Envoys helped. Both Ted's squads and mine. And my friends and their Envoys. I accept the responsibility, but it was a joint effort.”

“Do you know what it was that caused the Envoys to call you the Leader?” asked Anna.

Ted walked into the casual area and took a seat. “Actually, Anna, she might not. I do, because I was one of the ones that noticed what was going on. First, it was her going after the bullies – political, business, media and religious leaders that were bilking the population out of money, their freedoms, and their ability to think for themselves. She even traced some of it back to one of the groups we had to destroy. Second, compassion. Every Envoy we had to destroy was given the opportunity to change, to learn. They rejected it – all but two. And those two she treated just like anyone else, or more precisely, she treated them the same way she treated her friends. In other words, if they had a better idea than she had, she'd recognize it and go with it. She'd kid with them. In short, she respected them.”

“Third was her ability to shift gears with someone. There's been some times when people have come in under questionable circumstances. And she was ready to come down hard on them. Then, she found out who the people were and what they were trying to do, and ended up supporting them. All for very logical reasons. But she'd had to dig to find out the information,” Ted said. “And there's another reason. She was the one that made the connection – that Humans are actually Envoys in a body. This girl has turned Home on it's ear so many times – and been RIGHT every time – that there's no way the Envoys couldn't follow her. And no, it didn't bother me. I was following her right along with the rest. THAT'S when the decision was made to make her THE Leader.”

“I told her that I wanted her to be a bridge between Envoys and Humans when I first met her. She quipped back that she didn't look good in concrete and steel. Well, she isn't a bridge. She's more like a connecting link. She showed us who we are – who humans are – and that we can do more. It would take someone astounding to take her place,” Ted concluded.

“She did this all alone?”

“Nope. She'd formulate an idea and discuss it with me, Mata, Bart and others. Sometimes she was led to information that she didn't have, that caused her to formulate the ideas. Sometimes it simply because she is the way she is. Absolutely loyal to friends,

understanding of humans in general, and does NOT try to throw her weight around unless provoked. The Scots have a motto - 'Nemo me impune lacessit', no one provokes me with impunity. That's her, at least in part. She's not a Leader, in the sense of being a ruler. She kids that she's just going in a direction, and everyone else is chasing her. Well, it sounds like kidding. But it's pretty much the way it is."

"You know? This is hard, trying to show you all the different sides of her. She can't really be defined. Just experienced," Ted finally said.

"Before you panic, Anna," Muriel said, "what I do as an Ambassador can be done by anyone with some training. You've got the training. Betty gave it to you when we translated in. Along with the 'battlefield first aid' course and a couple of other things. They'll open up in the next couple of days. You've already got the most important part, the attitude. You're just you, and secure in that. You would have been trained, anyway. But having the right attitude was what decided me to make you an Ambassador. And you've demonstrated that I was right in my decision, just by the way you handled Sergei."

"This is a debriefing, isn't it?" Anna's father asked.

"In part, maybe," Muriel replied, looking sharply at the man, but tempering it with a smile. "But mostly it's an attempt to show Anna that she makes good decisions. Even moving the desk and putting a wall behind her office. That's a defensive move. Nothing gets behind her. Which brings me to you. There are times when Ambassadors are targets. And sometimes that slops over onto their family. It happened with me, which is why my parents came into this Enclave. I'd like to put you under protection. Honestly? I'd like to 'bring you in' – find a place for you in Anna's Enclave. And before that, put you up in the Guest House wing of the building where Anna's current office is. I'd also like to put a squad on you."

"Too late," Mata said. "They've already got one. They're staying in stealth, right now, but they'd love to meet you, formally, and let you know that they won't interfere with you and your lives unless you're in danger. You can talk to Muriel's parents about that. They've had a squad on them since just before they came into Enclave. The Envoys are much more discrete and better able to protect than the Secret Service used to be protecting the President."

"Used to be?"

"Yea, Muriel trained one officer on the President's detail, and she trained the rest of the detail," Mata said. "They went on to train the rest of the Secret Service. Our people are still more discrete – being Envoys we can just 'disappear'. You haven't seen them, but they're where you are and will be where you are until you're in an area they can secure, like a house." Mata then handed Muriel a piece of paper.

After reading for a moment, she looked up and said, "Sir, were you ever tested to see if you could take the Envoy training?"

"Why, no. They just said that my services were no longer needed," Anna's father said.

Muriel sighed. "Mata . . . ."

"Already on it. Guest House is expecting them. Anna's and your squads are ready to help in any way," Mata said. "This would be a good time for Anna to gain some confidence in training, and her squads are eager to help and monitor. They can have her parents trained by the time you wake up."

"That depends on their ability to make the mental link," Muriel said. "Anna?"

"Wait . . . OK, Nika just told me what to do. Sounds simple enough. Pa, I want you to look at me, where I am, how far away I am. REALLY look. Then close your eyes . . ." and she continued the litany, and moments later her father had the most remarkable look on his face. Five minutes after that, her mother was grinning like a Cheshire Cat, and almost vibrating.

"Well, now that that's cleared up," Muriel said, "you're free to take as much time as you need to learn the basics. As trainees, and of course our latest Ambassador, there is no charge for staying at Guest House, nor for meals either there or at any restaurant in Enclave. If there are any medical issues, let Nika know, and she'll call Mark. Mark is our Doctor. Well, one of them. The other is Fran, but she'll probably be asleep, soon, too. Mark is an Envoy. Fran is very human and one of the friends I trained shortly after I came here. Both are very good at what they do, which is Envoy style medicine. Gifts, souvenirs, anything like that, also free. And that's in ANY Envoy Enclave, not just here. Trainees are honored." Muriel sat back and closed her eyes for a moment.

"You look tired," Anna said. Then added, "Oh, HECK! Of course you're tired. It's evening for you. I'm sorry, Muriel. We shouldn't have kept you going so long."

Muriel smiled and opened her eyes. "Absolutely necessary, Anna, and nothing to apologize for. But yes, I'm tired. My day started at five o'clock this morning, our time. And now it's close to nine o'clock at night. But we've done good!" she said, firmly. "YOU'VE done good. Now, why don't you take your parents to Guest House, and complete their training, and I'll see you in the morning. Unless you go back early. My breakfast time would be about an early dinner for you."

When they left, Muriel looked at Mata, who simply pointed upstairs. "We can handle anything that comes up, girl. Go get your sleep. You've earned it." So, she did.



# Chapter 27

## What a Wonderful World (Friday Breakfast)

“Carla,” Muriel said, as she entered her office, “you look beat.”

“I am. Long night. Well, day for them. But it's done. Finished. Including the apartment for Anna and her parents. And an Envoy is set up to show them around and where everything is and how to work things. When I left, people were already showing up. I'm glad we got the dining room set up.”

“So, why don't you go to bed?” Muriel half asked, half commanded.

“I will, now. I just wanted to let you know it was finished. We even doubled the capacity, to allow for the extra countries that would be showing up. Both sides. By the way, the gift shop is making copies of your statue in batches of twenty five, trying to keep up with demand. You're a hit,” Carla said, then stood up. “Good thing I've got an apartment, here, now. Two of my people are fighting over tucking me into bed. One of them is a guy. I HOPE he's joking.” She grinned.

“One of them is a guy? And he's talking about tucking you into bed?” asked Anna, as she came in.

“Envoys don't have gender,” Carla said. “It wouldn't bother him at all, and he'd be very professional about it. No reaction like a normal male human at all. But it would make me feel funny.”

“I should think so!” Anna exclaimed. “I'd be tempted to throw something at him.”

“When we have a bunch of women to work with getting outfitted, my two guys will walk out of the room, and two women will walk back in. Same Envoy, different body and different name,” Carla said. “They do 'fit and form' as well, if not better, than my three women. And the ladies being fitted have no clue.” Anna just stared at Carla with her mouth open for a moment, then swung around and stared at Nika. “Oops,” said Carla. “Well, I'm going to crash for a couple of hours. Let me know when you're going back.”

“Anna,” Nika said, “it's true that we can switch. Most of us Envoys appeared to be male. Look inside yourself, and you'll understand.”

“Anna,” Mata said, “look at me.” She stood up, grew some, then changed to male. “When Muriel was first talking to Ted, he saw a need for someone her age and sex to teach her. So, I became a twelve year old girl. And blew it,” she said, relating the miss-cue in her name. “And then we talked about Envoys and how old we were, and how the structure of Home was set up as primarily male. And the little git asked me if my name was Matthew? Or

Matt. She KNEW! Outfoxed by a twelve-year-old,” Mata said, shaking her head. By this time Anna and her parents, both, were laughing.

“The next day, we got her connected to power, had her make shields, and I chased the 'boys' out of the room so we could teach her how to make clothes. I didn't think about it, and she never said a word. But you know how the first step is for the trainee to take off her clothes. A couple of months later I found out that she remembered that I had been male and it didn't make any difference to her,” Mata shook her head. “Just when I thought I was getting the shape of her knowledge and intelligence, I had to revise it upwards a LOT! And she's continued to surprise me all along the way, for the past four years. NOW you know why we try so hard to anticipate what she's going to need. It's the only way to stay ahead of her.”

“I hear a quotation coming on,” Muriel said. “Something about 'Run, run, run as fast as you can, you can't catch me . . .', or something like that.”

“Humph. I'm sure Chuck and Doug can come up with a large enough oven to make a gingerbread man out of you. Of course,” Mata said, “they'd have to rearrange things a bit to make it a man.”

Anna, in the mean time, was still looking at Nika. She shifted her gaze over to Mata and said, “I think that comment was a bit half-baked.” And the room exploded in laughter.

“Oh, she'll do well, Muriel,” Mata managed to sputter out. “That one was worthy of you.”

“Anna,” Muriel said, “did you and your parents have a chance to decide where you want to have supper?”

“Well, actually, what about here? There are things that I'd like to talk about, that I'm not sure that ordinary humans should hear,” Anna replied. “Like what I'm going to do with my Pa.”

“Oh, now, Anna,” her father said, “that's not something to disturb an important person like Muriel with.”

“Hush, you,” Muriel said. “You just let the women decide what you're going to do with your life, like a good man.” And she grinned to show that it really wasn't meant the way it sounded. “What did you use to do?”

“I was a designer for an automotive company.”

“Did you enjoy the work?” asked Muriel.

“Well, yea. It was frustrating, sometimes, but that was part of the fun – the challenge of getting parts to fit, and things to work right.”

“Jeff, are you available?” Muriel said and sent.

"Sure. What's up?" Jeff said as he translated in.

"Anna's father was a designer for a car company and got laid off. And he likes design work," Muriel said.

"Oh, OK. Oh, and Anna? The door's fixed. Doug called me in. The fix took more than just electronics. It's programmed to adjust the speed of opening to the speed of the fastest person approaching it. Now, sir," he added, then went silent. The two stared at each other for a bit, then Jeff called for Betty. "Envoy style engineering and design. Muriel, can Enclave hire him?"

"Nope. Hiring is done by Home, through Triple E, then the person is assigned to an Enclave," Muriel said.

"Oh, that's right. Sorry. Now I remember. OK, he's in my department. I may go with him the first few times to reinforce that he works for me, but basically he's going to take some of the load off of me," Jeff said.

"OK," Muriel said, then turned to Anna's father who was just finishing up getting a dump of the two courses that Jeff had requested. "Sir, may I see your passport, please?" Nervously, he handed it over. Muriel appeared to look at it for a moment, then passed it back. "There. If you're going to be bopping around for Jeff, then you need Ambassador status, too. The difference is that yours is for a specific purpose. Your daughter's is for administration of an Enclave, and to speak for me. I hope that's all right with you."

"What? Yea. Sure." The stunned expression on his face said it all. "I mean . . . just like that?"

"Hey," Muriel said, "what can I say? We're the fix-it guys."

"You're a girl," Jeff said. "I can tell. You go out where I don't, and I go out where you don't."

"Quiet, you," Muriel said. "We're trying to have a serious discussion, here."

"Oh, is that what we're doing. I thought we were just playing around," Jeff replied, and wiggled his eyebrows. Muriel hit him, and they both grinned.

"Oh, sir," Jeff said, "I hope you don't mind green. When we go out to factories we wear bright green jumpsuits with bloused boots, like this." And he switched to the uniform. The Triple E logo and name were over the left pocket, and his name was over the right. Combat style black boots, twelve inches high, with the pant legs bloused over them, a black belt at the waist with a flat buckle and the Triple E logo on it, and a hard hat with the Triple E logo on the front. The green was the same as the background color for the sign over the Triple E office doors. "It makes us stand out against whatever the company is using. Our job is to go in and help the engineering teams make things fit. We won't change the style of their vehicles, but

we will correct errors in how parts fit and work, and teach them how to make the parts. That sound OK to you?"

"Sure," Anna's father said. "Much like what I used to do before they switched to whatever they're doing now, except that I often had to actually design the parts and positions, myself."

"Oh, you'll get to do that, too," Jeff said. "But that's easy stuff compared to facing down some died in the wool engineer that just can't get his head out of the way things used to be. Don't worry, when you walk in with the Triple E logo on, they'll jump. NOBODY messes with us. We're the bosses."

Anna's father busted up, laughing. "Oh, I can just see how that's going to go over," he said. "That old . . . well, I can't describe him with ladies present. Anyway, I was let go because I didn't have the training. I walk in in this," he added, switching to a duplicate of Jeff's uniform, "and tell him what to do? He'll have a stroke." A smile spread across Jeff's face, hearing that.

"Yea, well you got the 'battlefield first aid' course, and can fix THAT for him, too. By the way, Home owns the company. It's administered through Triple E," Jeff said. "You literally ARE his boss. Anna, that's something that you'll need to consider when you set up your Enclave, is an office for a branch of Triple E. Oh, and an office for your father with 'Ambassador' on the window, or however you do it." Anna just grinned.

"You people," Anna's father said. "You're all totally crazy!"

"Shh! We're trying to keep it quite," Muriel said. "Otherwise EVERYONE would want to be this way. Seriously, does that make things better?"

"Oh, my. I should say so."

"Good. Ted's over there, now," Muriel said. "We bought your house, and a crew is fixing it up, making sure everything works right and making it more secure. We'll turn it over to you when we can figure out the paperwork. I understand that your landlord wasn't happy. But paying cash solved that problem. And another crew is going over your car. Of course, now, you'll probably get one of the new ones coming off the assembly line from your former plant," she added with a grin.

"Why are you doing all this?" Anna's father asked.

"Because you work for us, now. And we don't treat people like most human companies do," Muriel said. "So, where would you like to go for breakfast?"

Fran came in, looked at Muriel and just said, "What are you doing, hiring people without a physical?" She was grinning, though, so Anna's parents weren't upset. "OK, people, here's how it goes. I'm going to come to each of you, and touch your shoulder for a bit. When I'm done, any problems you might have had will be gone." She started with Anna's

father, paused for a minute, then went on to her mother and smiled as she put her hand on her shoulder. Then moved on to Anna and spent a little longer with her. "That's it, folks. Now, you're healthier than you've ever been, and will stay that way. GAD! I love this job. Muriel, I'd recommend a truck driver's breakfast for the three of them, even though for them it's dinner time. They'll need the protein after that jolt."

"What is this 'truck driver's breakfast'?" asked Anna's mother.

"Steak or ham, three eggs done how you like them, pancakes with butter and maple syrup or hash brown potatoes, fruit – I don't know what Chuck has on tap, but we should be able to come up with whatever you like that way. And coffee or tea, and milk for Anna," Muriel replied. "Oh, and extras if THAT doesn't fill you up. And that's happened."

"You know menus, too? You sound like a waitress." Anna's father said.

"Ha! No, I just happen to know that a truck driver's breakfast is. I've met a few, over the last four years, and I found that I like that breakfast, myself, when I'm depleted," Muriel said. "Years ago, oh, back before I was born, there used to be restaurants that catered to the working class and those that didn't have a lot of money. And they catered to truck drivers, too. They were called 'greasy spoons' because the cleanliness wasn't necessarily the best. That stopped being an issue when what we call 'fast food' started to take over. It was cheaper, faster, and the places were cleaner. I've read about them, but never really ever had a chance to frequent them. I do understand that there are some restaurants that have brought back the feeling of them, without the cleanliness issues, though."

The meal, instead of being in Muriel's apartment, was held in her casual area. Nobody really wanted to move. Chuck, as usual, outdid himself, and his squad chipped in bringing dishes and trays out for the hungry horde. They didn't even bother talking very much, each engaged in their own thoughts. The few questions that were raised had to do with cultural differences between the United States and Russia. It turned out that most of them were cosmetic rather than actual, and partly based on the nature of the physical locality. And, of course, history.

"Your squads are going with you," Mata said, as they finished their meal. "All except Fred, who will mind the fort. Your friends and their squads are going, too. Then there's Anna and her squads, and her parents, and each of their squads."

"Fran?" asked Muriel.

"I believe so. I think she got Mark to cover for her," Mata replied, "but I'll check. In the mean time, figure out how we're going to get in."

"Huh?" Muriel said, then looked at the site. "I see what you mean. The parking lot is filling up, and the front desk area and its casual area are both filled. Looks like we'll pull a Chun – come in airborne, and walk our way out of the air. I wish we had something like Chun does to announce ourselves. Then we could put on a show."

"Aaron Copeland, 'Fanfare for the Common Man'. Just make it loud," Ted said, coming into the office.

"Copyright. We'd end up paying performance fees," Muriel replied.

"So? It's not like we can't afford it. Do you know it well enough to do it?" he asked.

"No, but I will. Give me five minutes, and I can set it up. Tell the crew, full dress uniforms. Kilts are optional, but they'd BETTER have something on under them. We're not out to give the kiddies an education," Muriel said, and Ted laughed.

"Hold it!" Mata said. "I just got word from Melanie. The President's coming, too."

"Well, he can just lead, follow, or get out of the way," Muriel quipped back. "In fact, tell Melanie that 'Fanfare for the Common Man' is taken. She'll have to come up with her own gimmick."

Mata just laughed, then said, "OK, she wants us to go first. She figures that that will open up enough space to let them in. Besides, she says she's got a gimmick too, and to be prepared for LOUD noises."

# Chapter 28

## Stars and Stripes Forever (Friday morning)

"They're going to block traffic into the parking lot to let us four flying wonders land," Muriel said. "Sergei doesn't know. Chun only knows that she's coming in that way. And the Envoys that are clearing the driveway will be recording. They're giggling over the whole thing, so it's a good thing that they aren't around Sergei. We'll get to see the whole display, later. I want a bright glow from everyone. It's one thing for Chun to walk out of a thunderstorm. But we're going to be coming out of a bright sky. We'll only dim down just before we land. Places, everyone. Chun's going in, now."

They formed up crossways to the street, Muriel and Ted in front with their squads paired up behind them. Then Anna and her parents, and their squads. Then, behind them, Muriel's twelve friends followed by their squads. Ted, Muriel and her friends were all in dress uniforms with the fly plaid. One edge of the plaid, and both pant legs sported the 'thin red line' that denoted armed action. The squads didn't. The squads were dressed in Class A uniforms and bloused boots, and the shoulders of their tunics sported the 'Security' triangles attached to their epaulettes.

Anna sported the same dress uniform, but without the 'thin red line', and her squads matched Muriel's, right down to the 'Security' triangles. Her mother wore civilian clothes, and her squad matched it. Her father elected to come in in a variation of Muriel's, only using a green tunic instead of the pale gray, and with the name tag and company logo. His squad matched Muriel's for style, but again, went with a pale green tunic, 'Security' triangles and company logo.

Muriel put her ear-buds in, then translated the group to a point in the air. From the ground they just looked like a gray blob. As Chun and her squads passed the doorway to the building, Muriel clicked on the portable music player, and transmitted the sound all over as if it surrounded the area. With the first, combined, sound of the drums and tam-tam, they all lit up and began flying in. 'Fanfare for the Common Man' is only about 3 minutes long, and Muriel wanted them grounded and at the door when it ended.

Her friends and their squads peeled off to either side from behind, and shot ahead, going through the door, two at a time, and taking up stations against the walls, six to a side. Don and Fran were the first ones in. In Fran's case because there was a first aid station to the right of the registration desk as you came through the doors.

As Muriel landed and approached the doors and Sergei, she heard a voice in the crowd say, "Nice choreography. I wish I'd done that." Later, she'd find out that the woman was a movie director for Russia's growing entertainment business. As it was, she just kept moving, making space for the rest of her following to land. The timing was almost perfect, with the last landing just as she approached Sergei and the music ended.

“Nice entrance,” Sergei laughed, as Muriel unplugged herself from the music player and put it away. “The American President is going to have to go some to beat it.”

“Oh, I have no doubt that he'll try. A friend of mine is putting his entrance together,” Muriel said. Ted, Anna and her parents moved past her and into the reception area. “They should be coming now,” she added, just as the opening notes of the Stars and Stripes Forever rolled across the parking lot.

Fireworks went off, and out of them, walking on air, came the President and the Secret Service. But, more impressively, were the two squads of Marines in blues, doing drill team 'rifle tricks', including tossing them to each other, while maintaining a calm, march to the ground.

“I think I've been upstaged,” Muriel laughed to Sergei.

“I think so. Impressive,” he replied, then greeted the President.

Then, from lower down in the air, but just as far out, came the strains of 'Rule Britannia', and Taylor led his 'Jolly Greens', on ghost horses just barely visible, in at a gallop. And as they rode, Taylor stood up in the saddle. That signaled the rest of the two squads to go into some of the fanciest riding tricks seen outside of the Ukraine. They wove around each other in a dizzying display, then dropped the Russian or Cossack style hats on the ground behind them. Forming back up with the two squads surrounding the Queen, they again took off at a full gallop and, on reaching the hats, picked them off the ground and tossed them to kids in the crowd.

“Oh, now that's just showing off,” said Anna, who had come back out to see the display. “I'd like to see them try that on REAL horses. I've seen Cossack riders. They'd make this troupe look tame.

“Oh?” asked Muriel.

“It's much more dangerous on real horses,” Anna replied. “And much more exciting. Though, I must say that he puts on a good performance. Hmm. That gives me an idea,” Anna added. “I've been thinking about a distinctive uniform for my squads – a distinctive look that was very Russian, out of respect for the country. And the Zaporozhtsi, though Ukrainian, were a powerful force in the Russian military, as well as the embodiment of 'wild and untamed'. I think a modern variation of the older clothing might be appropriate. I wonder if any of my squad can learn how to ride. And sing.”

“Oh, my. I think I've created a monster,” Taylor said, walking up to them. “Hello, Anna. So, you're our latest Ambassador. Let me know if there's anything we can do to help you. Oh, I'm Taylor. Technically, Prince Taylor, but that's as bad as Ambassador,” he said with a grin.

“I want your people to show some of my people the techniques you use in riding,” she



said, without dissembling. "I intend to beat you at your own game. With REAL horses." She grinned. "It was a good show, but I think that people would like to see what real Cossack riding was like. And I need to see Carla, if she's around," she added to Muriel.

"You mean it about the uniforms, don't you?" Muriel said.

"Absolutely. I was told when I was learning to dress myself that Carla had 'invented' your uniforms by modernizing old Scottish ones. I'm wondering if she can do the same with the Cossack uniforms. It would certainly show some distinction and a feel for Russia," Anna said.

"Go get 'em, tiger," Carla said, coming up beside her. "Yea, I think I know the uniforms you mean. Like this," she said, sending an image to Anna. "And they could be modernized like this," and another image was sent. "Now, what color, and how elaborate?"

"OK, this is going to sound strange, but dark blue pants with the wide legged trousers bloused into the calf-high boots. Not the knee-high ones used by the military in World War I," Anna said. "I want the blousing of the pant legs to really puff. The pull-over blouse in khaki, belted. That's the one with the soft stand-up collar and puffy sleeves. Hat. The round wool one, not a peaked one. That will server for both dress and utility uniform. For formal wear, we add a . . . I don't know what it's called, but it's kinda like a cross between a robe and a coat."

"I know what you mean. Now, what you're imaging back to me is good, but I'm going to make a couple of suggestions, if you don't mind," Carla said.

"If I minded, I wouldn't have asked for your help. Of COURSE you can suggest. It'll either lead to acceptance or discussion," Anna said, with a grin.

"OK, Let's start from the top, down," Carla said, smiling back. "Hat – let's make that fur for you. Mink, I think. The curly wool for your squads. The blouse, for you it should have the sparkle effect that the other Ambassadors use. You'll come out looking like a gem. Especially in the formal wear, where I would suggest a red blouse instead of khaki. Belt – no. Use a sash. I think I know what you're going for, and that adds the older look to the uniform. And make it red. No, it's not the 'thin red line'. That will get added to the stripe on your pants when you've earned it. And the reason for the change in the hat is that yours would sport the Home logo on the front. You're the officer. Pants, no problem, and I agree with the wider trousers, but make the boots riding boots, like equestrians use, and simply blouse the pants deeper. Now, the over-tunic or coat. Hmm. I like the idea of dark blue, like the pants. But I'm having trouble figuring out how to make it sparkle."

"How about edging it in silver, and add the sparkle to that?" asked Anna. "And leave the front open, and with a full skirt to it."

"Oh, my. I think I see what you're doing. OK, let me show you the regular uniform, first, since the only change would be the color of the tunic," and she passed the image to Anna.

Anna thought for a minute, then suddenly was wearing the uniform as they'd designed. "Like this, I think. Hold on, I want to check the fit and feel. Especially of the boots and pants. Let's see if I still remember how to do it." And she dropped into a squat, and crawled sideways across the floor, arms folded across her chest, very erect posture, and the entire motion caused by crossing her legs, and bringing the crossed one back in the direction she was going, and up high, then planting it and repeating. She came back the same way, then kicked out ahead of herself while still retaining the squatted position. A few of those, and she suddenly jumped into the air, kicking her feet out at an angle each way, snapped her arms out and touched her toes.

Carla just stood there with her mouth hanging open during the display. "O-K," she finally said as Anna stood up. "NOW I see why you wanted the loose pants and blouse. How about the boots? And WHERE did you learn to do that?"

"A friend of mine was in a folk-dance troupe, and he taught me."

"Why didn't you join the troupe?" Carla asked.

"Because I wasn't old enough, and because I couldn't afford the costumes. Besides, those are actually moves that the men use. Women aren't supposed to know how to do them."

"Your idea was based off of those, wasn't it?" Carla said.

"A little more military than theirs, but yes," Anna replied. "And the boots need a little work. A little more support under the foot, if you know what I mean."

"Try this," Carla said, and sent an image of the padding and support of paratroopers boots. Anna applied the idea, and walked around a bit. She turned back, and smiled, then grinned.

"Good! Just what they needed. Oh, I CAN do it without the support, but why not be comfortable? Nika," she said, and sent the image of the uniform to her. She and the squads immediately changed into a muted version of it. And grinned. You could see them stand taller as they got the attitude along with the clothing. Much like what had happened with Muriel's friends when they learned how to put on the wolf's heads, or her squads when they learned the 'panther walk'. In short, even though she didn't know all their names, she'd just become THEIR leader, and even standing still you could almost see them swagger. She was just about to go back to Carla and discuss the coat, when a voice rang out.

"What is the meaning of this? Who are you people! You have no authorization to hold an assembly!" A middle-aged man in a rumpled suit that looked to have been slept in stood just inside the doorway, a group of what looked like police or military behind him.

::Mine, Muriel,:: Anna sent. ::And let him shoot me. Just throw a shield around us to catch any strays. I'm not sure he can shoot straight, even at close range.:: Muriel, who had

started forward, just sent back an acknowledgment and watched as her newest trainee walked into harms way.

“You! Peasant!” Anna projected so that the entire room, and maybe those outside, could hear. “You do not address people like that on these grounds. Take your minions and be off.” By this time, Anna was standing about six feet from the man, and facing him.

“What do you think you are play acting at, little girl. Get out of my way!” he said, his face beginning to color.

Sergei began to move toward the two, and Muriel touched his arm and shook her head. Sergei looked at her, then at Anna, then back and his eyebrows went up. It was obvious that he knew who the man was, and feared the worst.

“Let her be, Sergei. If she needs help, she'll get it. She has her squads, and they're ready to act on her word. And she has mine, Chun's and Taylor's squads. She will come to no harm. Trust me,” Muriel said, quietly.

“No, mister slob, I don't think so. You do not have authority, here,” Anna said. “This place is under Home rule, and I am Anna, Ambassador of Home to the people of Russia. You, on the other hand, have managed to break the only rule that Home has – you've broken the peace. So, I'm giving you the opportunity to leave, now, with your ruffians, and not come back.”

“Nobody speaks to me like that,” he said as she turned away from him. He pulled out a gun and fired at her back. The shock in the room could be felt as well as heard. Anna stopped when the gun went off, then straightened up and turned around, slowly.

“Nekulturny,” she said, her quiet voice amplified in the silence following the shot. She picked the bullet out of her shield, looked at it for a moment, then raised it above her head. The room seemed to darken as she did so, but the effect was because she brightened.

“For the benefit of those that do not understand the Russian language,” Anna said, slowly turning so that everyone in the hall could see what she held up, “nekulturny is a Russian word that translates into English as 'uncultured'. But in actual use it describes a person that behaves in an uncivilized manner. A slob. Or, in this case, a bully. He has fired on an Ambassador. That, in itself, is an uncivilized act. But worse, he has fired on an unarmed child – a girl that is less than half his size. And he did so at that girl child's back.” She finished her little speech as she finished turning and again faced him. And Muriel noted that the stripe on her pants now held the 'thin red line' that denoted armed action.

“You have broken the peace of Home. You were offered the opportunity here, in the presence of witnesses, to leave and take your people with you. You not only refused that opportunity, you added a second charge of disturbing the peace by shooting at me. Here in my hand is the evidence of that,” Anna said. “In accordance with my authority as Ambassador from home to the people of Russia, you and your collaborators are now under arrest. Your weapons will be removed, and you will be held in a secure facility to await my

pleasure and that of the Leader of Home. Nika," she added to her security chief, "would you be so kind as to disarm these unfriendly people, take them outside and cage them like the animals they are, please? Oh, and if you would put a sign on the cage, someplace where it won't obstruct the view of them, that says 'Nekulturny' in Russian and English, please. I'd appreciate it."

"It will be done as you say, Hetman," Nika replied with a grin. Anna turned away and walked over to Muriel and Sergei. A few people applauded, and it was picked up by others until the room was sounded like a drum.

"Hetman!" Sergei swore. "No wonder." He shook his head, then laughed. "Hetman, of all things. And a twelve year old girl, at that. That will set my guards on their ear."

"Hetman?" asked Muriel. "What is that? Like a head man?"

"Literally," Sergei, "and more. She IS a Cossack. You shall have a teacher, little Anna of the big voice. You shall learn to dance from the best. You shall learn to ride from the best. I promise you that. Of all things to have happen," he chuckled, "a Cossack as the first Ambassador from Home to the Russian people. And how far back can you trace, Anna?"

"Zaporozhtsi," was her simple reply. "Your nation tried to kill us, but many survived. Survived and joined with other Cossacks. Some fought against you. Some fought with you. But now the fighting is over. And I have formal wear to decide on. I apologize for the disturbance, Sergei. No one was in any danger. Including me. But I think I earned the 'thin red line' today."

"You did," Muriel answered. "Wear it with honor, Anna. You did yourself proud."

"Still . . . letting him shoot at you? That was a – how do you call it? – a very ballsy thing to do," Sergei said.

"Not really. I was told by one of Muriel's friends, the one that tests shields for her, that mine was stronger than hers was. And you know some of the things that she's been through," Anna replied. "I just asked Muriel to be sure that he couldn't hit anything besides me."

"Sergei, when I first learned to make shields I was shot at by five people. One of my squads. And it was all five at once. She has stronger shields than I did, then, and less impact to absorb," Muriel said. "That's why I let it go down. It also placed your man entirely in the wrong, in front of witnesses, which gave her the right as an Ambassador to act on behalf of Home and it's rule. No, what took guts was to use defense as an attack weapon. She never threatened him. She just told him to get out, then turned her back."

"He is NOT my man," Sergei said. "He's head of security for Moscow. Technically, he shouldn't even have been out here as this is outside the city limits. It's how I could afford the land, that and the fact that it had been vacant for so long. So, he was outside his jurisdiction twice. However, if there isn't something that you intend to do with him, I can have him

arrested for assault with a deadly weapon, assault with intent to kill, attempted assassination of an Ambassador – that one might not stick – and pretending to be a police officer outside his jurisdiction. And I can get this heard in a Federal court, away from his friends. He'll be away for a long time.”

“That would certainly help, Sergei. The worst we could do to him is take him to Home, and let the judgment take him. That can be bad enough,” Muriel said. “There are those that haven't survived it. But it would mark us as being the ones to force our way of thought on others. With you taking charge of him, it's simply a matter of your law catching up with him.”

“Then, that's what we will do,” Sergei said. “And it's possible, young Cossack Hetman Anna that is an Ambassador, that you will meet your trainers earlier than I thought. I will ask that a couple of my guards come out with the police. They are Cossacks from the Kuban area. Will that be a problem?”

“Not to me,” Anna said. “The friend that taught me some of the dance steps was one. I had heard about the rehearsals, and went to see one. He saw me trying to do some of the moves and steps, and met with me afterward. He was a very good teacher. He even said that there was a skit type dance that the troupe was thinking of doing that I could help with, if he could raise the funds for costumes for me. But then we moved to Moscow.”

“Well, we will have to see if we can find so fine an instructor for you,” Sergei said.

“And I'll try to find that troupe and find out what happened with the skit,” Muriel said.

Anna walked back over to Carla with a distinct swagger to her step and sparkle to her eye. To say nothing of the grin on her face.

## Chapter 29

### Zaporozhtsi

(Friday morning, later)

Carla watched Anna walk back across the floor to her office. A glance at her squads showed that they were all grinning and relaxed. An image came into her mind of the type of coat she should wear for formal wear. It was an image she knew well, but wasn't sure how it would look on Anna.

"Anna," she said as the girl approached, "I have an idea for formal wear, but I'm not sure I can pull it off."

"So, tell me," Anna said.

"OK," Carla said, and took a deep breath, "a Cherkesska, with the gaziri, but not ankle length. Maybe ending just below the knee."

"Yes, of course, the Circassian coat with the gunpowder caps on their wooden holders," Anna said. "And the coat wasn't always ankle length. A lot depended on climate and individual taste. Well, the regiments standardized them, somewhat, but originally it was more up to the individual and what he liked, and what he could afford. You do know that the gaziri were simply ornamental after the introduction of the cartridge bullets, don't you?"

"No," Carla said, "I didn't even know what they were for. Just what they were called."

"Oh, they were the measured loads of gunpowder, to make loading a flintlock type pistol or rifle faster," Anna said. "The guy that taught me made me learn all that stuff as we went along. Oh, and the Cherkesska? It was actually more like a sleeved vest than an actual coat. Only one button, about where the 'V' in your ribs is, then held together below that with a belt. For riding there were often two slits in the back, so that the skirt became three panels. My friend showed me the difference. It's harder to control in a dance, but actually looks more impressive if you can carry it off."

Anna sent an image – a better, more detailed one – back to Carla, and the woman scaled it to fit Anna and sent it back. In a moment, Anna was wearing it, feeling how it was weighted and how it moved. Rolling up the over long sleeves, which was normal for the Cossacks. Then tried a couple of spins, and watched the flare of the three-part skirt. A couple more adjustments to the lower hem of the panels, and they flared properly.

"How's it feel?" asked Carla.

"Not bad. We need to make this in flat black, though," she said, changing the color,

herself. "Maybe dark blue, but I think that the Kuban – and the Zaporozhtsi before them – stayed with flat black. And there's one more item that you may not have known about, and this is in red. It's a kind of hood, called a bashlyk, worn on the back. Actually, people in your country that are have their doctoral degree graduation use something like this, but as a stole. With them, the panels go down the front, and the hood balances behind. But, with the Cossacks, it was different. They put the whole thing on the back, clipped to the back of the Cherkesska, at the shoulders. From a distance, it looks like a giant 'M'. Think you can get it from an image of what it is, and how it's worn? I won't be able to see to mount it."

"Of course I can," Carla said with mock affront. "You're talking to a professional, here. And don't you DARE ask me 'professional what' or ask how much I charge per hour, you dirty minded little girl." They both giggled, and Anna sent her the image. Carla took it, turned Anna around, she applied what she saw including the 'weight' of the material and its thickness. "There, I think that does it."

"One more thing, Carla. I should have mentioned it before, and didn't think to. The Cherkesska should have a red lining. Can we do that without affecting the weight and feel of what we've already got?" asked Anna.

"Oh, girl, you're going to work my little, bony fingers to the bone"

"Yea, right," Anna giggled.

"OK, but why?"

"Oh, ranking Cossacks in the Kuban forces have a red lining," Anna said. "I think it's silk. It would show in flashes as they walk, and of course where the sleeves are rolled up to form a cuff," Anna said. And we can add the sparkle to that, and to the stripes on my legs. Oh, and to the red center on my hat and the bashlyk. It should show off well against the flat black."

Carla thought for a moment, then said, "Like this? Oh, and don't forget the red blouse."

"Oops. Right. OK, how's it look," asked Anna.

"Good! How's it feel?"

"Good, so far. I really ought to try it out for real, though," Anna said. "Any place we can do it? I'll need some room."

"Well . . . not in here. With this crowd? Not gonna happen," Carla said. "Wait a minute." ::Muriel, permission to put up a temporary stage outside? Anna wants to try out the formal uniform in a dance.::

::OK by me,:: Muriel replied. ::Will she mind an audience?::

::Ask her,:: Carla replied.

::Anna,:: Muriel sent, ::would you mind having an audience? I realize that it's not a finished work, or anything like that. But I'd love to see your uniform in action.::

::No problem, as long as you realize that this is just exercise, and not the real thing,:: Anna sent back. ::Wow! I just realized how useful being able to make a mental link can be. Does this work anywhere?::

::Yep. If you know the person, then you can connect,:: Muriel sent back.

“Sergei,” Muriel said to the Russian President, “Anna’s going outside to test her new uniform in dance, to be sure it does what she wants it to do. She DID say that it’s just an exercise, not a finished dance. But she doesn’t mind an audience, and I’d kinda like to see her in action. Wanna come?”

“You bet! If she’s doing what I think she’s doing, it should be spectacular,” he replied, and they trooped out to the front of the building.

Meanwhile, her squads had set up a stage as large as one that would be found in any theater, and Anna was going through some tests and exercises. In the process, she was showing her squads some of the moves that she did, and they were linked deeply into her mind, feeling as well as seeing how the moves were made, and the things to look out for. Finally, she felt she was ready. The uniform felt good, the boots felt excellent, and she was eager to show off a bit. Her squads trooped onto the stage, making a shallow semi-circular arc at the back of the stage, and it began.

Anna didn’t believe in starting easy. Her routine started with what looked like horizontal flips, launching off of one foot and rotating on the long axis of her body, to come down on the other, then stepping off again with the first foot. Over and over, making a circle in the center of the stage. Around her, everything had stopped. People stared at this small, indeterminate person doing circles on the stage. Then she stopped, facing outward and went into the next exercise – crawling across the stage from a squatting position and checking to be sure that the skirts of her Cherkesska didn’t get in the way.

She went both ways on the stage, almost to the limits, then stopped at one extreme edge and took two running steps and began doing hand flips to the other edge of the stage. This time, four of her squad members, the leaders, followed her, but not on the same line on the stage, also doing hand flips. She caught what they were doing as she stopped and turned at the other extreme of the stage, and laughed.

“All right, showoffs. Try this!” she said to them, and took two running steps and did single hand flips to the center of the stage.

There she stopped, and waited for her squad leaders to catch up with her, then she squatted down and began to do the famous Cossack kicks with each foot, never leaving the spot where she’d started. A few of those, and she stood up. Then she jumped, and touched her toes. Five times she did that, with her squad members working valiantly to keep up with



her. Finally, she stopped. And applause from that side of the parking lot broke out. Nobody paid any attention to the black bus drawn up under the carriage port, nor the seven people that had exited it. Had they looked, they'd have seen bars on the windows, but they'd have had to look close, since the windows were heavily tinted.

Of the seven men that got off the bus, two of them in camouflage uniforms noted the stage, and the people in Cossack costumes that were checking it out. They paid no attention to the leader of the other five, that was roundly cursing them in Russian. The two made a bee-line for the stage, despite the shouted orders of the leader of the other five.

"Be still," one of them said. "You have your job to do, and we have ours. And, unless I miss my guess, our reason is about to appear."

"Boris, I've heard about you and how you never follow orders," the leader shouted.

"Probably you have, Yuri. But have you also heard that I have ALWAYS met the needs of those orders?" Boris asked. "Besides, the man we're to report to is standing over there. We will see him when this is finished. NOT before. We will not disturb the President of Russia."

At that point, a small figure mounted the stage. In contrast to the others, dressed in tan blouse and black pants, obviously faded, this child – for child it obviously was – was in the full regalia of a senior officer or Hetman. The child went through some exercises, but they seemed more to see how the uniform behaved than to actually loosen up. One of the supporting troupe looked over at him, winked and nodded, then turned back to what the child was doing, very much like a mother watching her child.

Then it began, and, unlike a regular dance would start, this started with a bang. Horizontal spins in a circle. And Boris could see that the skirts of the Cherkesska were split twice, for riding, from the way that they fanned out. Boris was enthralled. *Oh, to have a student like this*, he thought. And felt a pang for another student he'd had that showed exceptional talent, but moved away. A total barbarian, she was, wild and defiant, but willing to learn as long as it was on her terms. And her last name engendered the running joke between them. For they both shared the same stigma. Their last names traced back to a now defunct clan that was noted for their ability in battle, and their fearlessness. The Zaporozhtsi.

Could this be the student that the President requested his help for? Now, the child was doing handspring flips, and still the skirts stayed out of the way, like they were specially weighted as some of the troupe he'd been a member of did with theirs. Then, he heard it: *"All right, showoffs. Try this!"* And he knew, watching her do single hand handspring flips back to the center of the stage. This was his Anastasiya, who had left him a year and a half ago when their family moved to Moscow. But that uniform! HOW could she afford it. And the troupe around her all wore armbands that said 'Security', and a naggingly familiar logo that he felt he should recognize. The same logo was on her hat.

And then it was over, and the crowd applauded. Anna and the troupe members that

had followed her took their bows. When the noise quieted down, he struck.

“Zaporozhtsi!” he shouted, raising his right fist and using command voice. And saw the shock on Anna’s face.

Anna and the entire troupe turned to face him and raised their right fists. And the “Zaporozhtsi!” that thundered back from them rocked the crowd. Boris didn’t see how she did it, but suddenly she was kneeling at the edge of the stage.

“Boris! What are you doing here?” Anna asked.

“Babysitting some Ambassador, from what I’ve been told,” he replied. Oh, and this is Viktor. Another babysitter.”

“Boris! Quit trying to make time with the girl. She’s just a child!” Yuri said.

“Yuri,” Boris replied. “Remember my orders? Remember how you said that I never follow them, and I replied that I ALWAYS achieve the purpose of them? Well guess what? I think I’m about to do it again.” He put his hands up to Anna and said, “Come on down.”

“Back up. No, really!” Anna said. “I don’t need help getting down from here.” Boris stepped back as Anna stood up and walked forward – onto empty air – then slowly moved to the ground. “See? Sergei!, could you come here, please?”

“Young lady,” Yuri said, “it’s improper for you to address the President of Russia in such a manner!”

“Mister, do you see that cage over there? The one marked ‘Nekulturny’? Well, in a minute, if you don’t stop sounding off over things you know nothing about, you’re going to be inside it. And then in a big, black bus going to explain to some judge why you feel that you’re more important than I am.” And from apparently nowhere, she pulled out a little green booklet and handed it to him. “Read. Now. Then tell me who I am.” Yuri looked at the cover, then opened it up. Then his face went white.

Boris took the booklet from him and read the ‘Home Passport’ on the bottom. “So, that’s what the logo was. I thought I recognized it.” He looked inside, then at Anna in shock. “You? An Ambassador? How’d that happen?”

“Long story,” Anna said, “and we’ll have time for me to tell you, later. Sergei, I’d like you to meet an old friend of mine, Boris. He’s the one that gave me a little training in dance. And next to him, on this side, is Viktor. They both seem to be out of the Kuban Cossacks. Oh, and on the other side is a very objectionable person called Yuri who, I can only surmise from his behavior, must be another police officer. Perhaps you could suggest to his commander that he learn some respect.”

“Ah! Finally, you come. Muriel’s people will help you transfer them to the bus, officer. Then you can leave, and stop disturbing the peace that this young lady can so ably enforce.”

They watched the still white faced Yuri move toward the cage, flanked by his own people and a squad of Muriel's. "Now, Boris. I asked for two people that could teach this young lady to ride and dance. I take it that you were the one that taught her dance?"

Poor Boris, hit with too many things at once, could only stammer, "Yes, sir."

"Good. From what I've seen, she's an apt pupil. And you, Viktor. You teach riding?"

"Yes, sir." The stunned look on Viktor's face said it all. He had no idea what he'd fallen into, but felt thoroughly out of place among such important people.

"Anna," Nika said, "why don't I show these men where they can stay, and get them set up. I can have them back out for lunch, shortly. And no, that doesn't mean that you can eat them." Boris just started laughing

"I can't believe this place! Are you ALL like that?" Boris asked.

"My fault, I'm afraid," Muriel said. "Oh, I'm sorry. I'm Muriel. It seems that every Ambassador I train ends up outrageous. I must say, though, that I approve of Anna's uniform and behavior. She stood up to Sergei – oh, should I call him 'the President' to save your sensibilities? – then put a pompous jack-ass in his place. That's the jerk that Sergei wanted picked up."

"Muriel? I'm sorry to say that I think I should know who you are, and that I'm going to be awfully sorry when you tell me," Boris said.

"Oh, you needn't be sorry. After all, I didn't trot out the titles. It's Ambassador Muriel, THE Leader of Home."

"Oops. OK, now I'm in WAY over my head. Anna, you WILL tell me how you got yourself into such exalted society. And I wish I'd worn my dress uniform," Boris said. Viktor, on the other hand, just stood there with his mouth hanging open. He looked like a person that was having a nightmare and wished he'd wake up.

"Viktor," Nika said, from beside him, "why don't we go inside and I can show you where you'll be staying. You look like you need a bit of a break away from all this high powered atmosphere. I promise, we won't bite. In fact, we can be very friendly. We might even be able to come up with a dress uniform for you, so you won't feel so out of place – not that anyone of any intelligence would care."

"Is this all real?" Viktor asked. "I mean . . . I don't mean to offend, but why would anyone of such importance want a couple of low ranking soldiers to train someone? Here. Among all these rich and famous people."

"Well, I don't think that your rank had anything to do with the selection," Nika said. "I think the request was simply for the two best at teaching riding and dance. You should have been told what you were getting into," she added in a kindly way. "Obviously you wouldn't be

offered the opportunity to turn it down, but it might have prepared you better for the shock. So, come. Get to know us – Anna's squads. Once you're used to us, you'll have no problem being able to do your job and get along with the high and mighty. I promise you.” She held out her hand to him, and he reached to take it. And utterly failed. “Try again,” she said. He did, and managed to connect.

“We're Envoys. Soul without a body. We simply look and feel like normal humans most of the time. Humans are soul WITH a body. You outrank us, because you have experience that we don't have – making decisions, dealing with a physical world, things like that. So, we are nothing to be afraid of. Just something to get used to,” Nika said, as Viktor shook. She continued to hold his hand until the shaking stopped.

::Now, here's how the shields are formed,:: she sent, and gave him the instructions.

And, off away from Viktor and Anna's squads, in the presence of Anna, Muriel and Sergei, Boris went through the same experience, but without the shaking. He was still holding Mata's hand when he said, “So, that's how it happened. Just because you could make a link.”

“Pretty much,” Anna replied. “And Ambassador was simply because I was the first in Russia to make the link. And now I have all these amazing abilities that I'd never dreamed of. So, we'll teach each other. You and Viktor will teach dance and riding. And I'll teach you both how to do amazing things that will disturb your commander,” she said, grinning. “And now you know how you were able to accomplish orders without doing what you were told, because you were subconsciously using unorthodox methods. Now, they'll be conscious. My security chief has just done the same with Viktor, so let's go get some lunch, and we'll finish getting you outfitted and feeling more comfortable with your new situation.”

# Chapter 30

## We Have a Problem (Friday afternoon)

The problem with Muriel's new method of training people in Envoy techniques wasn't getting it to work, but rather what to do with them once they're trained. In some cases, like Sarah and her parents four years ago, the answer is 'nothing'. Let them go, and they'll train others, and the population will increase.

But when the individuals belong to a military or paramilitary organization it's a different situation. Muriel went through it with Melanie, Henry, Frank, and Tex, and there were obvious ways to deal with the problem because, ultimately, there was support from above for their actions. On the other hand, there was no or very little support for training the military – until after they'd been trained and proved that it could work.

Now, she was training Cossacks, probably one of the most 'out of control' groups of people there were. At least, that's what she'd been led to believe. She soon realized that there was as much difference between groups of people as there were between individuals and families. And that was the case with both Boris and Viktor. They were the same, yet different. They both came in high as protectors, but their personalities were almost diametrically opposed. Viktor tried very hard to work within the rules, to follow orders, to keep a low profile. Boris, on the other hand, was a born rule breaker. Not from maliciousness or criminality, but simply because he often saw other ways to do things that were faster and more effective. And she came to understand that there were even more personality types in the Cossack regiments.

Sergei had no such difficulty with the personalities. But then, Sergei was a user – which was how he'd managed to come to power. He and Muriel were similar, in that respect. Both used people in whatever capacity they were best suited, or selected people for a task based on what personality would give the best outcome for a situation. It almost shook Muriel when she realized that she was similar to this ruthless politician, until she came to understand that it was a matter of degree.

And all this mulling over of possibilities and problems took all of lunch and even a half hour after. So, it wasn't until Anna came to her with two men dressed in the dress uniform of the Kuban Cossacks that she realized that the problem had already been taken away from her. Boris and Viktor were fully trained – that much was obvious – and were beginning to follow Anna around like puppies.

Sergei had already addressed the problem, found a solution, and was beginning to implement it, when he hit a snag. His solution was simple – Boris and Viktor would become liaisons to Home and the infant Russian Enclave. The snag was their commander. He was having no part of privates becoming liaisons. It must be officers, and they must be properly trained officers. In other words, his picked people. Making Boris and Viktor officers was out

of the question. They didn't have the qualifications, according to their commander. It was Melanie that came up with the solution.

"Shoot them."

"What!" Sergei bellowed, as Muriel laughed.

"Shoot them," Melanie repeated. "Trust me, it worked for me. Take them to the commander, insist that his picked people be there, then shoot Boris and Viktor. Then ask the commander if he or his picked people can withstand any attack, and aim the guns at his people. The commander might be willing to sacrifice his men. Might, but I doubt it. In any case, the question would be moot. The men, themselves, would be unwilling to be shot at."

"That's outrageous!" Sergei said.

Melanie, still staring directly into Sergei's eyes calmly said, "Blame her. She taught us all to be outrageous." And Sergei laughed.

"Mister President," Boris spoke up, "I'm willing. Anna told us about her experience with the commissioner of police, here, a bit ago. And Muriel told me of some of her experiences. And our shields are as strong as hers. I'm willing to trust what they say, and have someone shoot me. I'd prefer in the front to in the back, though, so I can see where the bullet is to pick it out of my shield."

"Mister President," Viktor said, "I didn't like the idea of being defenseless. Then Nika and Mata explained how shields are the ultimate weapon. And that we have weapons available beyond that. I agree. Shoot us. It's a Boris type of solution, I'll admit, but I think it would work."

"You have another card you can play, too, Sergei. The commander serves at your pleasure. You can fire him if he's still that obstinate," Muriel said. "That's been done, before, in America. Of course, we had information on those commanders that went beyond just their being recalcitrant. They were being manipulated by arms manufacturers with the promise of good paying jobs at the end of their service career."

"You will come?" asked Sergei.

"I will come. Anna will come. Boris and Viktor will come," Muriel said. "And Anna and I should have our security chiefs and a squad, each."

"Too much. Won't fit in the car," Sergei said.

"Anna, Boris, Viktor and I are not restricted to cars, Sergei. Nor are our Envoy guards. And as for you, I've taken much larger groups than you with me in a translation."

Sergei roared with laughter. "You call me fat! Well, and I am a bit. But to compare me to a large group of people. You really are outrageous, aren't you."

"Of course," Muriel said with a grin. "It's how I get people to move, quickly."

"Then we will do it your way. I just hope I don't get airsick," Sergei laughed back at her.

::Mata, I need an image.::

::He's not in his office, Muriel. Hold on. OK, we've got him located in a car driving west, away from his office.::

"Sergei, he's not in his office. He's traveling west, away from it," Muriel said. Sergei swore.

"Can you pick him up and put him back in his office?," he asked.

"Of course. Perhaps we should be there to receive him," Muriel suggested.

"Definitely," Sergei said, savagely. "He was told to remain where he was, and to get his prospective liaisons there, immediately. Heading west, he's headed to one of three possible sites. Most likely is a major arms manufacturer, and likely the people from the other two sites will be there, too. Both of them are high ranking politicians that advocate war and stronger restrictions on the population."

"OK. Let's go, then, and we can bring in his co-conspirators when we get there," Muriel said. She sent the image of the office area to everyone that could translate on their own, including how she wanted them arranged, then mentally grabbed Sergei and they all translated out.

The translated into a 'bull pen' office area to see a mass panic going on. "Lock it down, people," Muriel shouted, and both squads went into action, immobilizing people and rescuing records that were headed for a shredder.

Immediately after, all of Muriel's and Anna's squads appeared and started organizing the mess. Meanwhile, Boris and Viktor, without prompting, immediately went to the commander's office and started pulling files and papers. The commander came in to see the worst possible situation he could imagine – his people were effectively under arrest, and the office was being searched and records confiscated.

"What is the meaning of this?" the man hollered.

"The meaning is clear," Sergei said calmly and with malice. "You are under arrest, as are your cohorts. You were ordered to remain in your office, and have your prospective liaisons available. Instead, we find that you've fled, and your office staff is busy trying to destroy papers. You will face a court martial as well as civilian charges of conspiracy and treason. I will choose your successor from people that I can trust."

"Sergei, the other two are at the plant, along with the head of the company. We'll

translate them in as soon as they leave their cars. We'll also lock down the plant and the office of the head of the company, so it can be searched," Muriel said. And moments later, three more men appeared next to the ex-commander.

"You! You did this!" the ex-commander shouted.

"No, sir. You did. We're just cleaning up your mess," Muriel replied. Anna walked over to the man, looked him over carefully, then turned to Muriel.

"Regular army. He isn't a Cossack," she said.

And on the heels of that Boris emerged from the ex-commander's office with some papers in his hand. "Sir, it would appear that he had planned to hit the signing. In addition, he's the one responsible for sending the police commissioner to 'take over' the building," he said.

"More, Mister President. He was the one that was agitating to invade China after it had been annexed by Home. Here's the paperwork on that," Viktor said. "It includes the names of the politicians that were involved, as well as the names of the companies that expected to profit from such a move." Sergei looked over the paperwork, and his eyebrows raised. Around Muriel, this appeared to be their normal state.

"Well, that explains the blockage in the government's acceptance of a treaty with Home. Eliminate these people, and it will pass quite handily," he said. "Muriel, can I prevail on you to pick up these people, too?"

"Don't you think that that should be Anna's job?" Muriel asked. "After all, she's the one that's the Ambassador to Russia."

"Anna? Is she up to it?" asked Sergei.

"Ask her," Muriel said, with finality.

"Anna, I hate to ask this of you . . . ."

"It will be done," Anna interrupted him. "Muriel, I'll need some help from Home, to collect records and such. I'll also need to know who it is we're picking up, and where you want them put."

"You've got it," Muriel said.

"Cage them outside, like you did the police commissioner," Sergei said. "We can pick them up, later."

"OK. Then all I need are the names and images of their faces," Anna said. Then she turned to her squads. "I hate to ask you this, but for this mission I think you should all be adult males, and bearded. Is that possible?" As soon as the words were out of her mouth,



the females and children looking Envoys changed, and they all grew beards. Not excessive ones. Just enough of a bush to make them look fiercer. They also affected swords, though Anna and Muriel knew that they'd never be drawn. Anna grinned, and affected a sword of her own, but proportional to her size. "I love this job," she said, and Muriel laughed.

It took a few minutes to get the names and faces of the politicians, and to realize that they were all still in session. Anna held out one name and face for herself, and wouldn't explain why. They simply disappeared. A few minutes later Anna appeared back, and said that her squads were caging the individuals. Muriel reported that the offices of these persons were being raided by squads of Envoys from Home, and would have the information available for the President when he could tell them where to put it. It was a considerable amount of paperwork.

"This is good," the President said. "It is no way completed, but we have just made a good start."

"We have records of all that has happened, sir," said Muriel. "It will take up a number of disks, because of the number of people and Envoys involved. But they should hold up in court, as they all substantially show the same things. We can store the paperwork in a secure facility until it's needed, and can even make copies of all of it, with your permission, so that nothing suddenly ends up missing."

"Oh, really! Yes, I think that would be a good idea, then," he said. "Now, I have a phone call to make, then we should be able to achieve two things. One, we should be able to sign the treaty, or whatever you call it, recognizing the Enclave of China. And second, we should have the authorization for you to set up an Enclave here, under the able leadership of Ambassador Anna. Now, all that's left to me is to find someone to command this horde, and someone to be his second," he added, looking at Boris and Viktor.

"What?" squeaked Viktor. Everyone laughed except Viktor, and Boris clapped him on the back.

"Seriously, gentlemen, I'd like you two to head this division. Oh, you can delegate a lot of it. And it won't interfere with your being teachers for Anna or liaisons with Home," Sergei said.

"Sir, we're just privates. We don't have the knowledge or experience to handle a job like this," Boris said

"Oh, I think we can help with that," Muriel said. "It won't be the first time we've educated an officer, after all. It'll take a couple of days to unfold in your minds, but then it'll all be there like you had learned and used it for years."

"You can do that?" asked Sergei.

"You bet. There was this Admiral that became Secretary of the Navy, and didn't have a clue. When we got done with him he turned out to be the best Secretary the Navy had ever

had," Muriel said. "We can do it. As soon as we get back to Anna's office, I'll see to it. So, have you decided what you want done with those politicians and et cetera?"

"Hey," said one of Anna's Cossacks, "there's a big black bus out here that says they're supposed to pick up some people."

"Yes, thank you. I'll talk to them. Anna, I'd like you to come out, too. I want to impress on people what will happen if these people manage to get away or get to a phone," Sergei said. "For now, this office is shut down until Monday morning. Scat, people. You've got an unscheduled two day leave." Sergei headed for the door, and Anna fell in behind.

"Kind of sucks you along in his wake, doesn't he," Muriel said, coming up beside her.

"HA! Yes," Anna laughed. "And it's something I have to be careful of. But in this case, I know what he's trying to do. He's going to put the fear of ME in them. Drop back a little more. He gets the first move. Then I, or both of us, will demonstrate that it's not a good idea to let these people go after we've gone to the trouble of catching them."

"What? How?"

"Simple. I'll cocoon them. Smile prettily, and just wrap them up in shields so they can't move. Then talk quietly, while squeezing a little," Anna said. "Oh, I won't hurt them. Just scare them into realizing that we CAN find them, and that they'll join the ones that are in the cage right now if they try to help these people escape."

"Oh? Why are you going through all this?"

"Simple. Russia, right now, is a bunch of factions. Now, I don't mind honest discussion and disagreement. But these people in the cage wanted to own the world, and they don't even know how to run their own affairs. They're like your bullies in America, what you call? Ah, sociopaths. They care nothing about the people and the country, but just themselves," Anna said. "Russia is built on the idea of strength, as in 'I'm stronger than you are and will beat you up and arrest your family if you don't do as I say'. So, 'little' me will become a bigger threat. Sergei they will see as bombastic. Me, they will come to understand, doesn't need the act of being the loudest, because I don't have to be."

"Are you siding with Russia?" Muriel asked.

"No. Simply using their own tactics against them. And getting rid of the bullies so that the people can actually have a voice. Russia isn't as sophisticated as America is. In America, this is all more subtle. Here, it has to hit you in the face before you notice it," Anna said. "It isn't that I want Sergei to win. Oh, he isn't bad, just loud. I just don't want the little people to lose. Sergei is helping, in his own way. So, I will help in mine. Besides, he DID ask for help."

And that's the way it went. When Sergei was through talking to the men on the bus, Anna simply brought them out, in shields, and held them ten feet above the ground. She

talked quietly about evidence they had on the ones in the cage. She talked quietly about the fact that she now knew who each of the the men from the bus was, and could locate them anywhere in the world and pick them up. She talked quietly. But all the while demonstrated that she was not someone that they should even consider crossing. Then she set them on the ground, gently, and had her squad escort the caged ones to the cage in the bus. The display had it's effect. Sergei had scared them with the power of his office. Anna had terrified them that this one little girl who talked so gently could absolutely crush them. So Russian, and yet so un-Russian.

Muriel and Sergei were still laughing when they got back to the building where the signing would take place. Viktor and Boris simply looked confused, but Betty got ahold of them and gave them enough courses to start with to do their job, and explained what they were and how they would help. Anna just looked smug. She'd done a job and done it well. She knew she had. And she was satisfied with the result. So were her squads, now changed back to their normal look, that gathered around her without smothering her.

# Chapter 31

## We Have a Solution (Saturday)

Anna had expected that, in learning to ride Cossack style, she'd be working with horses. Well, in a sense she was. But it was a pommel horse. Viktor had her going from sitting between the handles, as if she were in a saddle, to one move or another over and over again. And she quickly saw the wisdom of this. First, she wasn't on a 'moving target', so she could see and study the moves as she did them. Second, it built up her strength, particularly upper body strength, so that the moves weren't a strain. He assured her that in a week or so she would be doing the same things from an actual horse back.

Her squad watched, carefully, both visually and from inside her mind, seeing how she did the moves, and helping her understand what Viktor wanted her to do when it wasn't clear. Viktor was as good as advertised at teaching. There were very few times when she had to rely on her squads to help her understand, and she KNEW that it wasn't Viktor's fault that she didn't. It was hers. Nor was Viktor upset with the squads helping, since it increased the speed with which Anna learned the moves. In fact, it allowed him the opportunity to try to get her to be as perfect in the moves as possible. And her strength increased very quickly, due to the Envoy training and how she applied it to her own body.

Dance was a whole different thing. Mostly lower body strength, and she already had some from working with and using the dance moves. But Boris was merciless. He didn't just teach her moves, he taught her how to put them together in a dance, to choreograph the dance into a story. Between the two tutoring episodes, she gained five pounds of pure muscle in the day. Muriel looked at her, skeptically, but realized that this would now flatten out, and the muscle growth wouldn't increase as dramatically again. But it resulted in a very lean, hard bodied young girl. In her uniform, it didn't really show except in the way she held herself. But Muriel had been up to the girl's apartment, talking with her while she was in the shower, and noticed the difference immediately when she came out. Every square inch of Anna was being built up, pared down, honed and polished by the workouts that the two men, now both her friends, were giving her.

Even her parents, by the end of the day, noticed the difference in Anna, but not necessarily the cause. She stood differently, walked differently, in general projected an image differently than what they were used to. Not bad, simply more confident in herself and not needing to pose as something other than what she was. Sergei just looked at her warily, like one would look at a snake that was definitely poisonous and way too close. What she'd done with the guards on the bus had made him realize that this gentle little girl was as tough in her own way as he was. It didn't stop them from being friends or kidding with each other. But it did serve as a bit of a barrier.

Not that Sergei had much time to see Anna. Between her lessons and his work with Parliament, it was mostly in passing. And work he did. Mostly by phone, but twice he met

directly with the two chambers of Parliament. The results spoke for themselves, though. He not only got the right to sign the recognition of the Enclave of China, but he also managed to get the treaty with Home passed, and Anna recognized formally as the Ambassador from Home to the people of Russia.

And the last two made Ted busier than ever. Now, he had land to buy, and local law enforcement to see, with a copy of the treaty, in order to try to avoid some of the hassle that he'd had in America. It would take Anna to actually sign the paperwork and introduce herself to the various officials. But that would be handled Monday, in the aftermath of the signing.

Muriel's day was spent mostly in 'idle chatter' – getting the various heads of state together in small groups in order to let them see who and what Chun was, and how it would impact their various countries. Poor Chun was beginning to feel that she was a toy doll being shown off. But she recognized the need for the leaders to feel comfortable with her and went along with it in her quiet, dignified way. Mostly, it was making sure that the leaders saw two things. First, that she, and China in general, had no designs on 'taking over the world'. And second, that China was NOT defenseless, and would not be interfered with. She was successful on both counts.

But Muriel, even being updated regularly by the Envoys, was perhaps the most surprised by the change in Anna. She could see the confidence in the girl, and the way she seemed to walk in a swirl of power. And it worried her. She knew what Anna had done, and how she had done it. Anna had tossed the courses that Betty had dumped into her to her Envoy persona – the original personality that had been the soul that had first decided to become a human so many centuries ago and that Muriel had forced her current self to acknowledge. Now, she feared that Anna had developed a split personality by doing that. Over supper in the dining room, she raised the question.

“Nope. Nothing like that. I'm still me,” Anna said, with a smile. “It's just that I DID connect with the Envoy soul. Possibly a stronger connection than you have, Muriel. Because of that, I can make use of some of the Envoy attributes that I otherwise wouldn't be able to. For example, I asked Betty how long it would take a course dump like what she gave me to open up in an Envoy. She looked at me funny, then said there wouldn't be any time, because the Envoys don't have a physical body to filter everything through. I already knew that I could draw on the experiences that the Envoy soul stored – yes, all of them. So, instead of storing them in my brain to open up over two days, I stored them in the Envoy soul. That made them available to me immediately.”

“Oh, and the swirl of power?” she added. “What I went through with Viktor and Boris should have exhausted me. The human body was never meant for that level of exercise all at once the first time out. That's because the human body takes time to repair – time to determine what has been done and what needs to be done. But just like with Envoy healing, the soul knows. If it's allowed to work, it can repair damage, build muscle, things like that much faster than the human brain can process. That's all apparent in the 'battlefield first aid' course. The swirl of power you see is just exactly that, the body is being checked over, stabilized, corrected, and power is doing it's work. But it does make me hungry.”

"I had a big breakfast and a big lunch," she went on. "And now a big supper. That may happen tomorrow, too, even though I won't be going through the workout that I went through today. Right now, my soul is maintaining my body for me, and handing back off to my body and brain as I provide the physical food for it to do so."

"You're using speed healing to reshape your body to handle the extra exercise!" Muriel exclaimed.

"Exactly. Oh, it CAN be done on power, alone. But it's better for the body to just let power stabilize it and let real food take over. The body's more used to that," Anna said.

"I hope you're passing this back up so that others can learn the trick."

"Definitely. Nika's deep in my mind, monitoring to be sure. She was worried at first, but now she's just double checking what I'm doing, and passing the technique on. And after this I won't have to do it again. The building will be much slower, simply maintaining as my body grows," Anna said.

As if she'd been monitoring the conversation, Fran left her office near the registration desk of the STILL un-named building and came over to Anna. There was some concern on her face, but only the sort of professional concern that she used when treating patients. She put her hand on Anna's shoulder for a bit, then smiled.

"Sorry about the concern. I just got word of what you were doing. However, it's all good. You're doing everything right. You've set up a feed-back situation where the soul is monitoring the body, while the body makes use of the experiences of the soul," Fran said. "I think I'm going to have to get in closer touch with my own soul, if it can produce effects like this." And she wandered back to her office.

"Well!" said Muriel. "After that, I can't be concerned at all. Even Mark, who's an Envoy, and the first doctor of human medicine in this style that there was, thinks Fran is better."

"Muriel, do you trust me?" asked Anna.

"Of course."

"Before the day even started, I checked with the, what you call, hive mind of Envoys for how to go about it," Anna said. "Mostly because I realized that, to make any progress with BOTH of the boys teaching me on the same day, that I'd need some sort of help. They, and my own soul came up with the program, drawing on that same medical knowledge that Mark and Fran have. It was either that or put one of them off until Monday. And I'd still have used a modified version of what I'm doing now. I need the strength to do the tricks, both dance and riding. But I couldn't do it ahead, because I didn't know what muscles would need improvement."

"So, you tied the muscle use to your soul, and let it build as you went," Muriel said.

“Something like that,” Anna replied. “A little more complex, maybe. I don't know all the details. My soul and I don't talk to each other. That's part of what you were concerned about, my ending up with the soul becoming dominant. It's more like a super sub-conscious. If I let it do its work it takes care of things for me or provides hunches for me to follow. You do it, yourself, you know. At least to some extent. It's part of the balance. But I'm still in charge and making the decisions.”

“May I join you?”

“Chun! Of course you can,” said Muriel. “Grab a chair. What's up? Nervous about tomorrow?”

“Nope. Tomorrow will take care of itself. No, I came to see how our newest Ambassador was doing. You put on quite a show, yesterday. I especially liked the way you grabbed the politicians right out of a session,” Chun said, grinning. “Of course, if you do that very often, then the name Zaporozhtsi may become synonymous with 'lightning strike'.”

Muriel and Anna laughed. “Blame my squads,” Anna said. “They were so taken by the fact that I was setting them up like Cossacks and could trace back to that old clan that they got a little out of control. Of course, it DID work to our advantage. The politicians were so startled that it was easy to pick them up.”

“And are you saying that you had NOTHING to do with it?” asked Chun.

“Well . . . maybe a little. OK, so it was in the back of my mind.”

“Uh, huh.”

“All right, I thought about it. But I wasn't intending to do it,” Anna said with mock defensiveness. “I only thought that it would be wonderful if that old name came back.”

“Well, from what I've heard from your Russian President, it did more than just startle them. It panicked them. He had no trouble getting the treaty and your recognition as an Ambassador passed through the two chambers,” Chun replied. “In fact, he's rather smug about it, today. He even got the ability for you to set up an Enclave, here.”

“I hadn't heard that. In fact, I hadn't heard ANY of that,” Anna said.

“Well, you will. He's making the rounds of the tables, now, telling everybody how HE found you,” Chun laughed.

Oh, my!” said Anna, then looked at Muriel. “Muriel . . . .”

“Hey, I'm easy. If he wants to take credit for it, fine. In fact, that gives you more power over him. He can't very well back away from something you suggest if he's the one that 'found' you, can he?” Muriel asked. And that brought laughter from the table.

"Ah, here she is. The prize of my life." thundered a very Russian and very male voice.

"About time you showed up, Sergei. What's with your waiting until now to let Anna know the news? She had to get it from a third party," Muriel said. "You want her to believe that she's nothing to you? Where would you be without her?"

"Which one of those questions do you want me to answer first," Sergei said. "Never mind. I answer none of them. Here is the treaty, signed by the heads of the two chambers, just waiting for us to sign it. And here, my dear Anna, is your recognition as an Ambassador, so you can quit skulking around. And here is the authorization to build an Enclave." He plunked the three documents on the table, nearly upsetting a couple of plates in the process.

"OK, we need some witnesses for the treaty," Muriel said. "Melanie and Chun can witness my signature. But you need a couple of your people to witness yours."

"Ah, I know just the ones," Sergei said. "Boris and Viktor. It's about time they earned their keep. Unless you've made them Ambassadors, too, and made them ineligible."

"Nope. And I don't mind. They're trained, not shackled. Just remember that they DO have the training, and that their methods may be different than yours," Muriel said. "Hold on, and I'll call them." ::Boris, Viktor, we need you over at my table,:: she sent, giving them an image of where she was. They arrived, looking very puzzled.

"Colonels, I wish you to witness my signature on this document. You can both write, can't you?" Sergei asked.

"Really, Mister President. We're not savages," Boris said.

"It's Sergei. In private or with friends, it's Sergei. When we have to be formal, then we have to be. But there's no reason why it should carry over to when we're private," Sergei said.

"Oh, I couldn't!" Viktor said.

"Do you like being a Lieutenant Colonel," Sergei asked.

"I don't know. I haven't been one long enough," Viktor replied, and Sergei laughed.

"Well said," Sergei replied. "But try. I would much rather have you too brutes as friends than as enemies. Very well, I will sign, then Muriel, then you two monsters, then Muriel's army."

"Here, Sergei. A present. And for each of you," Muriel said. "The pen that signed the treaty." And she handed out gold pens – fountain pens that would never go dry or clog.

Chun took hers and looked quizzically at it, then uncapped it and laughed. "Muriel, you are a gem. You KNEW I'd be signing with Chinese characters, and gave me a brush." She



created a piece of parchment and tried it out. "Oh, this is perfect," she said. "I'll use this for everything official."

"It's even self-cleaning and self-inking. And it will never run out," Muriel said.

It took five minutes and a separate table for everyone to sign. But, when it was done, Nika came and made copies for those that wanted them, which meant Muriel and Sergei. The original Nika put in a frame, and started back to Anna's office. She was stopped by Frank.

"Nika, for shame. You CAN'T put a plain frame on a Russian wall. That would be sacrilege." Frank took the framed document, and held it for a moment, then handed it back to Nika. Now, it was floral carving around the document, and a carving at the top showing Sergei signing it and the others waiting their turn. "NOW you can hang it in her office. Unless you want me to do it."

Nika just grinned at him and said, "showoff." Then took it to Anna's office.

By this time the original table was joined by the one that had been used for signing. And just in time. Ted came in and flopped into a chair. "It's done. I've bought the property. Oh, officially, it'll have to go in Muriel's name, as usual, unless she delegates it like she did with Taylor," he said. "But the property and the taxes have been taken care of. And since it's private land outside of the city, and under total control of Home, we can build as we like. It WILL be under total control of Home, won't it?" Sergei just handed him the authorization.

"OK, that's one thing out of the way. Now to get Anna accredited," Ted said. And Anna handed him a piece of paper. He looked at it, then handed it back. Muriel didn't wait for the obvious 'next'. She just handed him her copy of the treaty.

"Uh, huh. So, anything exciting happen around here, today?" Ted asked

"Naw," replied Muriel. "Kinda quiet. Nobody did nothing."

"That's a double negative," Ted said. "What you're actually saying is that everybody did everything. I'm just glad there's no language where a double positive indicates a negative."

"Yea. Right," responded Muriel, and the table broke up in laughter.

## Chapter 32

### Peace in Our Time (Monday morning)

It's always the same, with some variations. A whole crowd gathers to watch a bunch of people demonstrate their literacy by signing their names to a document, then stand around congratulating each other on that ability. Trust me, it's even more boring on television. The actual excitement and sense of history isn't in the paper – or in this case parchment – but in what it represented. China was now officially recognized as an Enclave of Home by three of the most 'important' countries in the world, as well as a bunch of others that wanted to be seen in such circumstances. Unlike other such political gatherings, there were no long winded speeches. Just the announcement that the document was about to be signed, the actual signing by the various parties, then the presentation to the audience showing that the deed was done.

What actually took most of the day was the preparation for the signing – in other words getting people up, fed, dressed, and into the auditorium behind the registration desk in the main building. The actual signing, considering the number of people and witnesses that signed, took about a half an hour. Following the exit of the principal players in this political game, and the mass confusion of the audience leaving as people went to lunch, was the attending of various events and demonstrations that Envoys and Envoy trained people from several countries put on.

Aside from the boring part, which was what had drawn everybody to that place, the crowd seemed to have fun. At least Fran thought so, considering the number of bruises, scrapes and abrasions, stomach aches, nervous conditions and one heart attack she dealt with. And Anna's, Muriel's, and Ted's Envoy squads were kept busy finding lost children – and lost parents – breaking up arguments, and finding lost articles. Anna was subjected to the sort of 'instant celebrity' that the media likes to interject in such situations, including being called a 'little princess' simply because her name happened to be Anastasiya. She retaliated by walking around the area, a child in full formal Cossack apparel while followed by a huge brute of an Envoy, that just happened to be Nika grown up and male. Nika enjoyed it.

After what seemed to some people as an interminable time, the day finally ended. Those not staying in the Guest and Visitor's quarters departed, dinner was served, and people started to unwind. Formal wear went back into trunks and suitcases, and people began to be their normal selves – more obnoxious. Sometimes drunk, but, with less volume of people, easier to control. Media departed – watching people being normal wasn't something newsworthy. Many of the notables from other countries took the opportunity to depart, most of them by the simple expedient of having their Envoy trained guards translate them back. And, in a nondescript corner of the dining room, a number of people and Envoys gathered to review the day and unwind. And that pretty much summed up Sunday.

Monday morning found Anna's father dressed in a bright green jump suit and hard hat,

walking out with Jeff and his squad. "I know that Muriel gave you your own squad, but right now you have no place to really put them. I'm sure Anna would lend you a squad if you need it before the Enclave is built. Or you can put yours in green jumpsuits anytime. And it might reinforce in the minds of the company that you really DO work for Home, now," Jeff said. "This is more an introduction than anything, though it'll finally give you a chance to see what they're working on."

They translated to a spot a bit further away from the exit of the assembly line than Jeff had planned. Fifteen cars were lined up in front of the door. With their appearance, a very belligerent man came boiling out of the opening toward them.

"I thought you said these cars would work. They won't even run!" shouted the man. "We had to push them out of the way, and now the assembly line is shut down. And you," he said, pointing to Anna's father, "you don't work here any more. Get out!"

Jeff just looked at the man and said, "I told you, when we first trained you, that we would be putting an Ambassador in charge of this operation. Whether you like it or not, you are employed by Home, through the Envoy Enclave Enterprises. This man is that Ambassador. Unlike you, he's fully trained. And the reason you're not is because you could not pass phase two of the training. So, you have enough knowledge to be able to build the cars, but not to do the many things that he can do."

As he spoke, Anna's father looked over the cars in depth. All of it with his mind rather than his eyes. And started laughing. "What's so funny, Smart Alec?" the engineer in charge of the line said.

"Oh, my. Jeff, can I see the plans on this car?" asked Anna's father.

"Of course," and Jeff pulled a roll out of a 'no pocket'. "Any particular area?"

"Power plant," said Anna's father. "I have a hunch what's wrong." Jeff unrolled the roll, and flipped pages until he came to that section. Despite the wind and lack of a flat surface, the roll behaved as if it were nailed in place in the air. Anna's father took one look, and turned to Jeff. "I was right. Look at the cars with your mind."

Jeff did so, and busted out laughing. "No wonder they didn't run. You never connected the system to the power converter. What idiot was in charge at the time? He should be fired for not QC-ING this. Quality Control is YOUR department. These should never have left the line without that stage being checked." Meanwhile, Anna's father went back to the front of the line and began making the connection on the cars. He was back a minute later.

"OK, they're done. Your yard crew can move them, now. And you need to check the ones inside," Anna's father said.

"I told you to leave!" shouted the engineer. "You don't work here any more. We don't need some cocky Cossack in this department."

"Somebody call me?" Anna said, quietly. The engineer looked over at the girl. Then up at the giant, bearded monstrosities behind her. "Oh, don't mind them," Anna said. "They keep following me around. My mother and father said I could keep them. Now, about the cocky Cossack remark. Oh, and for your information," and she pulled her passport out of a 'no pocket' and handed it to the man. Her father did the same."

"This is some sort of a joke!"

"No joke. You've manged, in just a few minutes, to insult Home, it's Ambassadors, your direct boss, his boss, and the person responsible for the smooth running of the Home programs in this country," Anna said. "That's in direct violation of the contract you signed with the Triple E in order to keep working here. I looked up the records this morning. You fired a bunch of people – denied them the opportunity to get the training by firing them before Jeff could even see if they were capable. This man happened to be one of them, and it came to the attention of THE Ambassador to Earth, and THE Leader of Home. Now, despite being told that he's your new boss, you continue to try to fire him and cap that by insulting a whole people. I don't think Ambassador Muriel really needs your kind of person working here anymore."

"Somebody called?" said another female voice. And the engineer groaned. "So this is the bigoted one, Anna?" Muriel said.

"It would appear so. And from what my father is feeding me, he did a botch job on a bunch of cars coming off the assembly line by pulling a stunt that even a third rate technician should have been able to find and correct," Anna said.

"Basic electricity," Anna's father said. "When all else fails, check the power connection. The cars simply had to be plugged into the power converter. And, instead of doing that, he's been standing here bellowing that it's our fault."

"Jeff, you have the authority, don't you?" Muriel asked.

"I do. So does Anna's father," Jeff said. "When I delegate, I don't second guess. You taught me that, Muriel." They both turned and looked at Anna's father. He suddenly realized exactly how much power he had, turned and smiled at his former boss.

"I believe we no longer need your services. Clean out your locker and be off the property in fifteen minutes, or be charged with trespass. Daughter, can I borrow one of your people to go with him and see that he does no harm?"

"Of course, pa." And one of Anna's Cossacks grabbed the man by the arm and grumbled, "let's go."

Behind the department head had been another man, whose eyes just kept getting bigger and bigger as the events unfolded. With the firing of his boss, and the eyes of four Ambassadors on him, he nearly panicked and ran. Or wet himself.

Anna's father's eyes bored into the man, holding him in place, and he quietly said, "Do you think you can correct this situation now, and get the line running?"

"Y-y-y-yes sir!"

"Good. Why don't you do that, then, and I'll make arrangements with the head office to make it official. Go ahead. You're in charge," Anna's father said, gently. The man scrambled, giving orders and directions to everyone in sight, while scrambling to get out of sight of these unusual people.

::Felt good, didn't it,:: Muriel sent to him.

::No,:: answered Anna's father. ::It felt like I was taking food away from his family. I was more upset with what had to be done than with doing it.::

::Good answer,:: Muriel replied. ::If it helps, he has a nice little nest egg that should keep him going until he can find another job. At least, if it doesn't take five years, that is. He's been getting 'under the table' money for doing the dirty job of removing undesirables – meaning people like you that think for yourself.::

::OH!:: Anna's father sent. ::OK, that helps a lot.::

::When Jeff told me there was a problem with this plant, and Anna and you came to my attention, I had my analysis team run a check on the company. We'd thought we'd gotten rid of most of the bad eggs,:: Muriel sent. ::We missed one. Sorry. But you handled it as a gentleman and a true boss. Jeff, he's a keeper.::

::I thought so,:: Jeff said. ::I checked his attitude when I talked with him. He's a good man, Muriel. What happened to him happens to a lot of good men. It's the low level bullies, like that, that are keeping down a lot of the population in all the countries. And that's the problem that we really face. We can cut the head off the snake, but the body just grows a new one.::

::How did he pass the sniff test?:: Muriel asked.

::My fault. I didn't check deeply enough. I figured that for just level one it wasn't as important. THAT won't happen again,:: Jeff said.

::OK, no real harm done, now that it's been caught. And we'll correct as we go along.:: She smiled at Jeff, and Anna and her father suddenly realized that the last question and answer were done for their benefit. Problem found, solved, and corrective action taken all in one short interchange, without any bombast or accusations, and with compassion for the one making the mistake. They both stored the lesson.

Anna's squad member came back out with the man, and headed for a car in the parking lot. He helped him put his stuff in the car, then watched as he drove out the gate. "He won't be back," the Envoy said. "The shields won't pass him. Not saying that he might

decide to get someone else to do his dirty work, but HE won't be back."

"Then I suggest that Anna and I go back to her office. I believe she has a lesson this morning. Oh," Muriel said to Anna's father, "if you would, please, let Anna know when you get back. I'd like to talk to you both a bit. No, I'm not going to holler at you. You've both done well and should be proud. No, this is simply that I might be able to help you buffer that feeling you had when you had to fire the man. It's not an unreasonable feeling, and is part of the balance. But there are points of view that can help you not beat yourself up over decisions you make. I know. I've been there." And she turned and she and Anna blinked out, along with their squads.

"She's not kidding," Jeff said. "She spent one night wondering and worrying if she'd made a bad decision. We, and I mean all her friends and our Envoys, her Envoys, and Ted and HIS Envoys, spent the whole night just wrapping her in love and understanding until she came out of it. Come to find out, she was beating herself up for something that somebody else had done, and not what she had done. She's been through some serious sh . . . stuff, man. That was a night well spent, even if we were all exhausted the next day. A bit of payback for all she'd done for us."

"You sound like you're in love with her."

"HA! No, nothing like that. Oh, we all love her. But no, nothing romantic. More like a big sister or a mother," Jeff said.

"Hmm. Yes. Oh, by the way, both Anna and I saw what she was doing with you. Compassion. Not just for friends, but for any situation. See a problem, correct it, and go on. Instead of finding out whose fault it is."

"Yea," said Jeff. "I could feel it in her mind that she thought you'd catch on. That's part of what she wants to talk to you and Anna about. But bigger is when people try to throw guilt at you. I think her statement at the end of the episode I told you about was 'don't second guess yourself.' Oh, she makes mistakes, too, by the way. And corrects them when she realizes they're mistakes. Heck," Jeff added with a grin, "even I've pointed out some whoppers to her. It's kinda like a family thing. Know what I mean?"

"I'm beginning to. Let it rest for a bit, and I may ask some questions as it filters in."

"Fair enough. Now, let's go beard the administration in their den and put the fear of you in them," Jeff laughed.

Meanwhile, back at Anna's office, Muriel was saying, "Look, I'm not going to come down hard on you or your father. You reacted because you felt him agitated and thought that he might be in trouble. So you ran to help. No problem. We all do that. And just being there WAS a help to him. So, quit beating yourself up. You didn't take over for him. You let him do his job. Your decisions were good, and for good reasons. Go with your decisions. Let the balance help you make them. Believe me, I got in trouble twice because of my decisions when I was about your age, and not sure of myself. The first time, I got in over my head, and

had to be bailed out by an Envoy. The second time, various media threw questions at me that caused me to feel guilty over a decision I'd made. Come to find out, they were being paid to try to shake me – make me doubt myself. The decision I'd made was good. It was my reaction to the questions that was bad.”

“So, what did you do about it?” asked Anna.

“I stopped second guessing myself. By the way, Jeff and your father are having the same discussion,” Muriel said. “Oh, I still make mistakes and have to correct them. Or at least take responsibility for them. But I don't beat myself up over them. If there's a problem, fix it and go on. Don't worry about whose fault it is, just do it. It keeps me sane, sometimes,” she said, grinning.

Anna giggled in return. “It's hard to imagine that you make mistakes.”

“Well. It's less now than it was. I've learned from my mistakes. And I've learned better ways of doing things. That's what I want to pass on to you and your dad. However, right now, you've got someone that wants to beat up on you, or make you beat up on yourself, anyway.” she said, indicating Viktor who'd just come in the office. “So, I'll see you after lunch with your father. OK?”

“OK,” Anna replied, and she went to be tortured some more.

“What do you think?” asked Mata, appearing next to Muriel.

“No sweat. She just needs confidence in herself. I can't give it to her, but maybe I can help her to give it to herself,” Muriel replied.

“We'll help,” Nika said, coming into Anna's casual area. “You're good. You stood back and let the whole thing play out, then had that little talk with Jeff. Believe me, the message was received and stored. By both her and her father. I just hope she doesn't ask us to wear beards again. They ITCH! I have no idea why men insist on wearing them.”

“They think it indicates wisdom, like the longer the beard the more they have,” Muriel said. “Like THAT'S going to happen.” And all three women laughed.

“So, where are you going to hold the meeting?” Mata asked.

“Well, I thought down here. But her office isn't really set up for it. I want to play some of the episodes from when I first started out, and get them to second guess my decisions. Particularly the episode of the rescue of the Embassy personnel. But some others, too,” Muriel said.

“Your office, then. The casual area, or the break room, where you can put them up on the bigger screen,” Mata said. “The break room might be better. Less official.”

“You two do realize that I'm listening and taking notes on how to manage an

Ambassador, don't you?" asked Nika.

"Of course. Why else would we be having this discussion in front of you?" Mata said, and they laughed. "Seriously, Muriel's easy to work with, because she DOESN'T think she knows all the answers, and is very open to discussion. That might be something else that we can show her," mused Muriel's security chief.

"Hmm. Good point. Then Nika can help keep her out of trouble."

"Actually, I'd have gone along with every decision she's made, so far. Well, actually, I did, didn't I," she said, laughing. "But really, she's made good ones, and carried them off beautifully."

"How do you know for sure?" asked Muriel.

"I'm that deep into her, and she into me. You know, it could be that she's getting feedback from me, without even a discussion, just because of that link. That, and she's VERY in touch with her soul and the balance," Nika said.

"Is she conscious of it?"

"I don't think so. OH! Yea, we can make her conscious of it, and that will bring out the discussions," Nika said. "Well, anyway, that's after lunch. Just make sure you leave time for her to sign the papers on the property. We want to start building."

"OK, no sweat. That's first priority, then the discussion. Hmm, I think I know how to get them into my office. Would you come, too?"

"Sure. I'm making it a habit to be where she is. Which reminds me, I should be at the lesson," Nika said.

"OK. We break until this afternoon," Muriel said, and left the office with Mata.



## Chapter 33

### Owning an Enclave (Monday afternoon)

Muriel and Ted went to Anna's office right after lunch and found that her father was already there. Muriel explained that, though Anna wouldn't be able to actually sign the papers, that the experience would be good for her, as in the future she might be setting up an Enclave for some other country. So off they went to the bank that held the existing mortgage. Alice Wilson, Muriel attorney, was already there.

"I can't do much," Alice said. "I'm not licensed in this country. But from what I can see, this is a plain, cash transaction. No hidden costs have been added in, per the information that Ted gave me, and no attachments or fees. The title only goes back one hundred years, but they guarantee it in writing. I think they'd have a tough time trying to take it over once it's signed and the payment is made."

"OK," Ted said. "I'd like to look at the paperwork myself, just to be familiar with it." He took the copy and scanned it, briefly, then took the SECOND copy and scanned it. "Alice, did you see this?" and pointed to an area on each document.

"No, I didn't," she replied. She looked up at the bank officer. "Not good. These two documents don't match."

"OK," Muriel said. "Lock it down." And forty two Envoys were suddenly in the bank, freezing all computers and accounts, and acting as guard around the officer. They were smiling and friendly, but VERY adamant that NO one was going in or out until this was settled. There was some grumbling, but not much.

Anna, meanwhile, contacted Boris and asked him if he was anywhere near the President. And if he was, would Boris request his assistance. Oh, and would Boris translate him to the coordinates of the bank. It took all of fifteen seconds, and the two were standing beside Anna.

"What is this?" asked the President.

"Look at the two documents," Ted said. Sergei set the two, side by side, and went line for line. On page two he hit the glitch, and looked up at the bank officer.

"Are you the manager of the bank?" Sergei asked.

"No, sir," the officer replied.

"Who is he, and where is he," Sergei growled.

"Um, he was in his office," the man said, pointing to a back corner walled in space. Sergei just nodded to Boris, who translated to the door and tried the knob.

"Locked," Boris said.

"Break it," Sergei said. "My responsibility." A loud crack followed that statement, and that was followed by a bellow from inside. The bellow chopped off, and the manager was at Sergei's side.

"Muriel, I understand that you can tell when someone is lying. Is that right?" asked Sergei.

"Yes, sir," Muriel replied.

"Will you assist me, then, please?" At Muriel's nod, Sergei went on, "Is this your doing?"

The manager, obviously nervous, looked over the papers, then said, "Everything is in order."

Sergei grabbed a pad and wrote an address on it. "Can you find this?" he asked Boris.

"Yes. Easily. It's the offices of the Bank Examiners."

"Bring them," Sergei said, in a voice that sounded like the slamming of a coffin lid.

Boris was gone ten minutes, while the manager and officer fidgeted. He was back with three people.

"I would like you to look at these two documents that were meant to transfer property from the seller to Home. I want you to see if there is anything erroneous about them," Sergei said.

One of the men did the same as Sergei, laying the documents side by side and going through them line by line. Again, the stopping point was page two. "Well, well, Dmytro. I was surprised to see you here. But, seeing you, I'm not surprised to see this. Isn't this the same scam that got you in trouble the last time?" the Examiner asked. "And you were supposed to stay out of any financial institutions, according to the court. Mister President, this man needs to be arrested. New documents drawn up as a simple cash transfer, without all the extraneous words. I can do that, myself, with the help of a copier."

"Sir, with your permission, may I see what you need copied?" Anna asked. The Examiner looked at her, then asked her for her surname. On hearing it, he opened his briefcase and pulled out a document.

"This is the only one I have. We will need two. One for the buyer and one for the seller. Copies can be made from the seller's copy to send to the appropriate registry offices."

He handed the single page to Anna, and she handed him back three. His eyebrows went up, briefly, then looked closely at the girl. "You wore a different costume, the day before yesterday, did you not?"

"Yes, sir," she said, switching to her formals. "I believe you mean this."

A slow smile spread across his face. "For formalities sake, can you show me any identification?" Anna matched his smile, and produced her passport. And the Examiner laughed. He looked in it, briefly and handed it back. "Madam Ambassador, it is my pleasure to meet you in person. I happened to see you practice dancing, the day before yesterday, and in the same costume. And these two copies are identical to the original, including the tea stain in the lower right corner. You have impressive abilities for one so young, and I look forward to meeting you again under more favorable circumstances."

He quickly put the original away, and added the property location and survey information, the selling price, and the details as to seller and buyer. "You!" he said to the bank officer, "you can sign for the seller, that is, the bank?"

"Yes, sir."

"Good. Look at this and see if it's correct. Then hand it to these people to check. If all is in order, each sign, then exchange and sign again. Don't forget to date it." That was quickly done, and Ted withdrew a bank check from a 'no pocket' and handed it to the Examiner, who handed it to the officer. "I will ask this kind gentleman," indicating Boris, "to assist me in relieving this establishment of it's trash," he said, indicating the bank manager.

"I would be honored to assist you. Where would you like to go, sir," asked Boris.

"The federal courts of law," the Examiner said. "Bring the other two, also, if you please. We can make our way from there. Then you can return to your duties with my thanks." And they translated out.

"Well, that concludes our business, here," Ted said, and he dismissed the squads with his thanks. The squads translated out, then Ted, Muriel and the rest followed.

"Well, that was exciting," Muriel said when they got back to Anna's office.

"I'm sorry I interrupted," Anna said.

"I'm not," said Muriel. "You were polite, deferential, and did what needed to be done, quickly and efficiently. In short, you provided a service and put us in a very good light with the Examiner."

"I agree, little Anna," said Sergei. "Even though I was the one that requested him, it was you and your quiet, polite ways that eased the situation. Oh, I talk too much, and am too gruff, sometimes." Now Muriel's eyebrows rose. "All right, all the time," Sergei said, laughing. "But you did well. And now it's time for me to go back to my card game and see if I will let the

President of France beat me.” He waived and walked out to the dining room.

“Well, the reason I wanted to talk to you both was exactly about Anna's feelings when she got back here,” Muriel said. “No, I'm NOT complaining, criticizing or disciplining you. What I want to do is show you some records of shortly after I was made an Ambassador, and let YOU critique ME, and help you to understand how I came to decisions that I made, and whether they were right or wrong. But this is best done in my office, where I have a large screen to show them on. Besides,” she said, “I haven't had a chance to really show it off to you, yet.” They translated up to Muriel's office and she directed them to the break room area.

“Mata, you have the order of the records, don't you?”

“Yep. And I'll stop them whenever you say, so you can discuss them. Can I be included in the discussions?” she asked.

“You sure can,” Muriel replied. “Though you and I have gone over these, before. So, first up is JUST after I was designated as an Ambassador, and before I got the accreditation. In fact, it's the person that I got the accreditation from that this involves.” And Mata played the record out to where Muriel sent the Secretary of State out to his car.

“Wow! Such rage. Yet you contained it and simply used it to create the effect you wanted. You were a bit rough on that official,” Anna's father said.

“I think she was justified,” Anna said. “In fact, if I understand the treaty right, she could have had him arrested. So, actually, she was gentle to him.”

“Mata?” Muriel asked.

“Muriel and I have discussed this, and we disagree. She claims that any action she took would have precipitated the same end result. He tried to assassinate her. You'll see that one, next. Me, I sometimes wonder whether just having him arrested would have stopped the situation from developing.”

“OK, I'm jumping over one, because all you hear on the record is me saying, 'nonononononononononononono' over and over, and the feeling of abject fear. That's the one where a rocket propelled grenade was launched at the bus. You can see that later, if you like. So, the next one is going to move rather fast.” and Mata brought up the episode with the missiles.

“Holy CRAP!” said Anna's father when he saw the missiles coming for the front of the building. From that point on, things went REALLY fast.

“You grabbed the President of the United States?” asked Anna. “Oh, my gosh.”

“AND his Secret Service guard,” Muriel said. They were quiet through the rest of it, then sat and pondered a bit.

"You were obviously angry. But it wasn't the anger that drove it. It was the outrage at being attacked by the same man. You WERE extreme in your actions, and should have been sent to prison," Anna's father said.

"I don't know, pa. I think she was justified. She'd tried just putting the man down, and throwing him out. Muriel, was the same man involved in the grenade attack you talked about?" Anna asked.

"Good question. Yes, he was. He didn't do it, but he ordered it. And each time my friends were involved," Muriel said.

"Something Jeff said to me about you. That your friends loved you like a big sister. Or a mother. That's what you were to them, weren't you?" Anna's father asked.

"Yes," said Muriel.

"I change. You were justified. He was going after not only you but your friends. Your children, in a sense," Anna's father said. "Did you stop the missiles?"

"No, my friends did, with the help of an Envoy that I trained."

"You trained an Envoy? I thought they WERE the training," he said.

"They are. But a few went bad. I saved two of them, by bringing them in and giving them a chance to learn right along with my friends. They had just finished their training when the attack occurred," Muriel said.

"One thing Russians know. NEVER get between a woman and those she feels responsible for," he said. "I'm surprised you left him alive."

"He died in prison. We think by another group of baddies. We'll never know. They were killed in a different raid we pulled," Muriel said. "Now, I'm going to jump over a lot. This episode happened later, and involved people in an American Embassy in a foreign country that didn't like us." And Mata brought up the Embassy rescue from the point where they first got the request, to the point after Muriel addressed the Media. Two very sober people watched the whole thing without comment until the very end.

"You doubted," Anna said. "You doubted, but not because of what you'd done, but because of the questions the reporters asked."

"Yes."

"You had no reason to doubt. The reporters were attacking you, trying to make you look weak," she said.

"Yes."

"This is the episode that Jeff told me about, where all your friends sent love to you all night long, isn't it?" Anna's father asked.

"Yes. And it took all night for me to understand that it wasn't me that was wrong, but the reporters. And I went back and touched the balance, and it told me the same thing. I had been merciful. Even though those soldiers died, it wasn't my doing. And the Embassy workers were all rescued safely by those same friends," Muriel said.

"You're telling us not to doubt," said Anna's father.

"No, I'm telling you to look to your balance when you DO doubt. It will know if you need to take some restorative action. I've doubted many times since then. But the first thing I do is check to see if it's disturbed the balance. If it hasn't, then it isn't a real problem. If it has, then I need to do something to correct it, if I can," Muriel said. "Do you understand?"

"I think so," said Anna, and looked thoughtful. "What I did with the police commissioner. I could have killed him. Instead, I had him and his men arrested. And the balance tells me it was neither good nor bad. So, it really wasn't something to be proud of."

"Wrong scale. The balance ONLY tells you whether you were right or wrong, or neutral, which is to say it didn't matter what you did. That's all it can do. However, judging how well you did a job is something that you and other humans do. And I'm telling you that you did well. Sergei felt the same way. Which may be why he was going around saying that he discovered you," Muriel said.

"And the politicians. Same thing," said Anna. "But I felt that we did it right. Outrageous, but right."

"And so you did," Muriel said. "There's nothing wrong with outrageous. Sometimes it does half our work for us, because it makes us larger than life. OK, I think that's enough for right now. My other exploits are on record, and your Envoys can get them for you. You're welcome to go through them and see whether you think my decisions were good, bad, or neutral. There's also an easier way that's a bit more direct. Think of scenarios, yourself, and see what your balance tells you. One of the easiest is to look at a person and think about training them. What I'm trying to do is get you to consciously do what you are already doing subconsciously. You really don't need to go through some of the experiences I have – some of the self doubts. So, that's your homework," Muriel said, laughing at Anna's face. "No grade, no hand in. And I'm always available for questions. OK? Now, how about the courses you've already taken. Have they started unfolding yet? Or can't you tell."

"I know mine have opened up. Nika asked me a series of questions, and I was able to pull up information from the courses to answer them. You know?" Anna said. "I think I like that way of going to school," and she giggled.

"I'm not sure, yet," said her father. "I think they have, but I have no way to test them. Unless . . . ."

"Yep. Same thing that Anna did. Ask your security chief to help you," said Muriel. "Well, I think that's more than enough for one day. Schools out." Anna and her father translated out like school kids dismissed on the last day of class, and Muriel chuckled.

"Good choices. I wondered when you selected them," Mata said. "That last was a little heavy for Anna, wasn't it?"

"Was it too heavy for me?"

"Point made. Yea, she might have to go through her own bad situations. You know, this is the hardest part of being a security chief to a child. Watching them have to grow up too soon," Mata said.

"Well, think what it was like for the child, before she had a security chief that used to be a man," Muriel said, tweaking her a bit. "In my case, I was already grown up. In Anna's case, she's still very much the innocent, even having been put through seeing the things I did. It's still not her making the choices and worrying about them. And if I have my way, she won't be worrying about them, because the balance will tell her if she's going wrong before it happens."

# Chapter 34

## News from the World (Tuesday)

Muriel was seated in the dining room, quietly nursing a cup of coffee and toast when Ted walked in. "Heard the news?" he asked.

"Nope. I've just been waiting for Sergei to show up. I figure he's going to want an accounting of what his country made hosting this little shindig," Muriel said. "And, 'oh by the way what's going to happen with the building now?', or some such slipped in like a defensive tackle going through the line."

"Hmm. Nice imagery and contrast," Ted said. "Well, to make it short and sweet, we're being roundly villainized by half the nations in the UN, and there have been calls for a referendum denouncing our actions and calling for our heads."

"About what I expected," Muriel said. "I can even guess the countries that are most vocal in denouncing us. The so called Arab world, followed by a few hold-outs for communism and some others that have been bought. Oh, and India and Pakistan."

"Why, how'd you guess?"

"Simple. That's the area I expect to see try to remove us, next," Muriel replied.

"Oh? You're expecting an attack?"

"No," said Muriel. "I'm expecting LOTS of attacks. Every Enclave has been warned to be prepared for either terrorist activity or bombs or missiles."

"What about Chun?"

"She's already gone back. She said good-bye about fifteen minutes ago. She's borrowing about five hundred Envoys from Home to put up a shield that would be self-perpetuating over the whole country," Muriel said. "She's expecting the same thing, only more forceful, if that's possible. The only thing she's worried about is the collateral damage OUTSIDE the shield. What will bombs do, going off against a shield? Something like a shaped charge, I'd imagine."

"Let me contact her. There's a way around that, if she doesn't mind sacrificing about half a mile inside the border," Ted said. "Make it two shields. The first allows something in, but not out. The inner one keeps things out. That traps the blast between the shields, and other countries, then, don't have to worry. Of course, that isn't going to do anything for missiles and bombs that LAND outside the shields."



"You did a study on this?" Muriel asked.

"Oh, yes. Years ago, in maintenance section. About the time you brought in that grenade," he replied. "Let me get the word to her." He went silent and thoughtful for a minute, then smiled. "Her brother has been keeping in touch with the hive mind. He pulled it down from there. But she appreciated my contacting her to suggest it."

"We're still going to lose people from the civilian population," she said. "And we'll be blamed for it."

"Hmm. Maybe not. Let me see what we can come up with for a general warning about such people. Without naming names, of course. That will come later, after the first attack," Ted said.

"OK, but do it from here. I want you around when Sergei shows up."

"What for?" asked Ted. "You've got all the figures. And we'd agreed ahead of time that after the signing the building was his. This little episode hasn't cost his country a cent. And it's brought in a modest but tidy sum. Still is, really, as people have elected to stay on for a bit."

"It wasn't that bit. It was the possibility of our running it for him after he took over," Muriel said. "He's just the type to take advantage of it."

"Well, at the time that we made the offer, we didn't have an Ambassador to handle an Enclave. Or even the possibility of an Enclave, for all that. We saw it as a way to shoehorn our way in," Ted said. "We also offered to take it off his hands as part of an Enclave, if you remember."

"Oh, I remember, all right," she said. "I just don't like the idea of having a Guest House out here. Too exposed. And we didn't design it to be behind a wall."

"Hmm. I may have an idea. Let me feel him out, and see what he thinks."

"Oh, oh. NOW I'm worried. You're thinking," she said, just as Bart came in with a large ABC fire extinguisher. She held her laughter until Ted had noticed it and scowled. Bart just grinned. He exited, with the fire extinguisher, leaving the grin behind to fade, slowly.

"HO! My friends! How are you this fine morning," Sergei said in his quiet voice that couldn't be heard beyond the OPPOSITE border of Moscow.

Muriel grinned. "Fine Sergei. We were just thinking about you. What are you going to do with the building when we turn it over to you?"

Sergei laughed. "You bring that up with all the tact of using a sledge hammer to kill a fly."

"Well," Muriel said, "I didn't want it to slip your mind."

"You are a nasty, devious woman, Muriel," he said.

"Well, I DO try," she replied. And he laughed some more.

"In honesty, I don't know. It is not set up to have a wall around it, like your Enclaves. And it would be so close to your Enclave that people would go there, instead. As a resort, it is both too large and too small. I suppose the best thing is to have it torn down, then try to sell the land," he finally said.

"Well, certainly we could do that for you. In fact, we'd have to, since our building methods aren't like yours," Muriel said.

"Hmm," Sergei thought. "What would you offer me for the land?"

"Well, I don't know, Sergei. I mean, we just bought a large piece of land to put an Enclave on. That's a significant outlay. And, of course, we'd be getting it as an unimproved property . . . ."

"Oh, ho! And you expect me to believe that you would bargain fairly with me?" Sergei asked. "I am supposed to beggar myself dealing with you?"

"Well, you COULD deal with Ted," Muriel said innocently.

"Maybe I should. I'm not sure I trust you. Are you sure that you're not a Cossack?"

"Not me. I'm white," she said, punning her last name.

"Very well," he said, and turned to her partner. "Ted, what would you offer me for this property?" Ted quoted a price that was more than Sergei's original asking price when they set up the deal for the signing. "So little. But here it has this lovely building on it."

"Which we would have to tear down, at our expense," Ted replied with a straight face. "In all honesty, Sergei, we should have offered less."

And so it went, like two horse thieves haggling. But the end result was already forecast. Sergei didn't want the expense of running the building that he didn't think he could fill – after all, it was a purpose built building, and not really equipped to handle the volume of a full resort. It would have become another 'cheap hotel' that was expensive to run. And Ted and Muriel DID want the property, but it wasn't necessary to their plans. In the end, Sergei accepted their original offer – with a grin for the fun he'd had haggling – and they all trooped back to the bank to pester that poor officer. He was glad to see them. Of course he was. That's why he was hiding in his new office when they came through the door.

Thanks to the Envoys that were actually running the building, Muriel and Ted knew exactly how many guests and visitors were left, and how soon they'd be leaving. Ted made

arrangements to pay the taxes on the new piece of property for one hundred years, and talked to the land register about conjoining the properties into one parcel. A little name dropping and the deed was done, so to speak. And the three stalwart friendly enemies trooped back to the signing building that never had a name.

Anna's father came in about that time, and he had his squad with him. All of them still in their green jumpsuits and hard hats. It looked like a lawn progressing toward Muriel. But he obviously had something on his mind, so she stepped aside to speak with him.

"What's up," Muriel asked him when he got in range.

"Oh, just a question. I know that Jeff works in conjunction with Triple E in your Enclave. Would there be any benefit to having a branch of it, here?" he asked.

"Definitely," Muriel said. "And lawyers, as soon as we can put the word out, and get the Enclave built. And I'm going to make a difference between the American Enclave and here, if you don't mind. I got saddled with so many hats that I'm always busy. Russia is larger than the United States, and more spread out between population centers. So, I'm going to shift hats around a little. I want you to handle being the head of this branch of Triple E, and let her concentrate on troubleshooting and training."

"Um, I don't really know how to handle the business aspects," he replied.

"Neither did I," Muriel said, smiling. "But a couple of courses cured that. And there really isn't any work to it. In a sense, you'd be another type of troubleshooter, but limited to the business. We'll put an Envoy in charge, and the office will actually be run by him or her. Your job, should you choose to accept it, will be to check every once in a while to see if there are any problems, then throw your weight around to solve them."

He laughed. "Is that really how you do it?"

"Pretty much. Well, you saw Jeff in action at the plant, and did a bit of weight throwing yourself to good effect," Muriel said. "The business courses you'll get, including Ted's methods and practices, will help you make good decisions on what companies to buy, and how to go about doing it, and how to manage people. Actually, in the position you'll be in, that mostly means making sure that they know damn well that YOU are in charge, and they WILL do it your way or leave. But it won't always be just that car company. And Ted or I will keep you aware of upcoming possibilities, and ways to raise money. If all else fails, we fund it out of Home."

"Um . . . I hate to be a pest, but how do you fund it out of Home?" he asked.

"Mm. OK, I want you to think of a tea glass and holder. Got a good image of it in your mind? Good. Now, just like you do to make clothes, make the glass in your hand. Very good. Now, fill it with hot tea, just like you like it. Got it?" asked Muriel.

"Yea, I think so."

"Excellent. Take a sip. How is it?" she asked.

"Good."

"Now, instead of tea, you want a soda. So, think of the tea becoming soda," she said.

"Huh! It certainly looks like soda. Tastes like it, too."

"Those are all very real items. They're made of power, reduced to shields with characteristics, then further reduced to actual solid and liquid objects. Just like your clothes are," Muriel said. "So, now, without counterfeiting, make a plane gold coin about the size of a dime."

"Oh. My. Gosh! You create gold and exchange it for local currency!" he exclaimed.

"Well, that's a bit simplistic, but that's about it," she said, and giggled.

"But how?"

"Energy is matter at the square of the speed of light. So, therefore, matter is energy reduced to normal speed. Shields are somewhere in the middle," she said. "OK, now that's REALLY simplistic. Betty has courses on physics, if you're interested. Jeff might even have them. Or he might be able to explain it better. Me," she said, "I don't worry about it as long as it works."

"And you bought all the property and paid all the taxes on the Enclave with manufactured gold," he said, shaking his head.

"Actually, ALL the Enclaves. And it isn't necessarily gold, though Ted does use that. It's anything valuable that can be traded for cash," Muriel said. "At first, it was because Ted didn't exist on earth, legally. So, he created a persona, an Ambassador from another place, and pushed it through that way. Now, everybody knows about Ted, and it doesn't matter, because he's STILL an Ambassador from Home."

"And the food, like here?"

"Created. Some chefs can make complete dishes from nothing. Others have to make the ingredients, then combine them the way a normal chef would," Muriel said. "Talk to Chuck, one of my security people. That's how he makes meals for me. Perfectly nutritional. No preservatives, because they're consumed immediately."

"Oh, wow! I've gone through the looking glass. This is a whole different world to me, now," he said, and started laughing.

"Before you ask, yes Anna knows. She caught on immediately when she was making her clothing and got quite a giggle out of it."

"I just thought," he said. "If you can create, you can destroy."

"Yes," said Muriel. "In a variety of ways. That's how we take care of sewage and garbage. And we create our own water, so it's pure. And all of it is power, converted. This building has its own power converter. Enclaves have one large one, that handles the entire Enclave, with possible exceptions, like clinics and Ambassadors offices. Enclaves are self-sufficient. In fact, we could withstand a siege better than the people that were laying siege to us. We might even have to offer them food and water, just so they could go on." And that got them both laughing.

# Chapter 35

## Goodbye to a Building (Wednesday)

The last of the visitors had left. Steve and his manager had removed all the artwork. All the other rooms were empty. All that was left were the personal effects of Anna and her parents. Carla had had Envoys working feverishly at getting shell buildings up. They'd be finished later. A power converter was already in place, providing power, water and sewage disposal, and all pipes and wiring were laid, underground. The parking lot and outer wall were nearly complete, just needing the transfer of Anna's office equipment and apartment furniture, then the demolition of the building used for the signing of the acknowledgement of the Enclave of China.

Carla was just coming up to the front doors when she spotted Anna and her family, and Ted and Muriel. "OK, time to say goodbye to this old place. My squad are inside, now, making sure that nobody is still in there, then they'll transfer things over. It should only be about five minutes," she said. "And, if you haven't made your bed, everybody's going to know."

"Made my bed! But I . . . . Grrr," Anna growled, and her parents laughed. "I will get you for that, Carla. It might take awhile, but I will get you! Americans. You can't trust them with anything more advanced than a TV remote. And even that takes advanced training for them." And Ted and Muriel laughed.

"OK, I just got the signal. Everyone's out, and the leftovers are moved. And here comes my squad. So, no loud noises or dust, people, just a simple removal of a building." Her people ringed the building in the air, leaving the front to Carla. She lifted up, and suddenly the building seemed to melt from the top, down, until there was nothing left but the bare ground it had rested on. Even the utilities had been removed.

"That's it," said Carla. "Mister and Missus Khmelnytsky, we've taken the liberty of duplicating your house inside the Enclave. You don't have to use it, but it would be closer to work for Anna and you, Mister Khmelnytsky. Or, we can create anything you like for a house. The head of maintenance for this Enclave is already seeing about setting up both a hard-surface track and an off-road track to test cars on. So, why don't we go to Anna's new office, and see what changes she wants to make."

When they translated to the front of the new office, Anna said, "So far, it looks the same, other than the fact that it fronts on the street rather than on the reception area of the old building."

"Well, there is one change, and I hope your not unhappy with it. Your father is right on the other side of the wall from your formal area," Carla said. "But we duplicated what your office looked like, then moved in the furniture and equipment. So it should be the same."

Mister Khmelnytsky, why don't you go look at your office and see if you need any changes."

He and his squad immediately set off on foot for the door, which obligingly got out of his way. He stopped just inside the door, and simply said, "Wow!"

"Something wrong, pa?" asked Anna.

"Something VERY right. Carla, this is great. I even have my own maintenance bay, a slanted desk for full sized drawings. A plotter and printer – good grief! You set me up with a designer's office," he said. "Bull pen for the troops to work on drawings, break room, and behind that – behind a glass wall – the maintenance bay complete with a lift."

"We figured you'd want to be able to design not only on paper, but on the actual object," Carla said. "Well, Jeff felt that. He has to go to maintenance section to do his. There wasn't room in his office. He said he'd be by to show you how everything works. He did say that, with a vehicle on the floor, you can see the weight loading for each wheel on a computer screen, to make sure everything is properly balanced."

"Well, I know one thing. I've been thinking about it for a while. The green jumpsuit is OK for visiting a factory. Sets us off from the others, and screams at them that we're the ones that are actually in charge. But we need something casual for work and home," he said. "What do you think, troops, something like this?" and he sent an image to his squad. What he got back was generalized acknowledgement and BIG grins. He smiled back, and they all changed.

Definitely distinctive clothing. Anna's mouth dropped open. "And after you telling me that I was being childish! Pa, I'm beginning to think that you said that simply because I thought of it first." Sure enough, the style was the same as Anna and her squads used for normal wear. But rather than tan over black, his and his squad's were white over tan, and the sash was blue.

"Well, if it's good enough for you, then it's good enough for me," he said.

"Just don't expect me to get into one of those archaic costumes that the women used to wear. Yes, they're attractive. But they're awful to wear. No thanks," Anna's mother said. "I'm quite happy that I'm not officially involved and can wear what I like."

"Oh, ma! When I'm not being 'official', as you call it, I wear dresses," Anna said.

"Or jeans, or shorts, or whatever you think you can get away with," her mother retorted.

"Well, yes, there is that. But more and more I'm wearing dresses. And not just because you want me to," Anna replied. "I never had places to go to dress up for, before. And I find that I like it."

"Oh? And where do you go that makes you feel that you're required to wear a dress?"

“Ma, you're standing here with the Leader of a whole other world, and the first Ambassador of that world, as well as the President of Russia. We've just gotten through meeting a woman that took over a whole country, the Queen of Britain, the President of the United States and a whole bunch of other national leaders, and you ask me that?” Anna said. “It's a whole new world. Suddenly pa and I are important people with an important job to do, and making more money in a year than we ever could have expected to make in our entire lifetimes. And with skills that other people envy.”

“Ma, I don't think you realize it, but you don't have to wash clothes anymore. Oh, there's nothing stopping you from doing it. But you don't have to. Clothes are fresh and clean each time you put them on. You don't have to spend long hours sewing a seam, when you can just imagine how you want something to look and make it, whole. We've had some of the most fantastic meals that have ever been thought up by the mind of man,” Anna said. “And, in this case, they were thought up, literally, by Envoys. And you can do it, too. Just about anything that Envoys can do, YOU can do.”

“Hi, Missus Khmelnytsky, my name is Bobby,” a boy said, coming up to them. “Did I pronounce it correctly? 'KMEL-nit-skie'? I'm a friend of Muriel's, and human in case you're wondering. And you've been thrown into something that is way beyond your understanding and experience. I know. It happened to me, too. But, if you take it apart, a little at a time, it gets easier.”

“Hello to you too, Bobby,” Muriel said, kidding.

“Oh, hi, Muriel,” he replied. “I didn't see you there,” he said with a grin that totally belied his words. “Work, girl. Some of us have to earn our pay.”

“You work?” asked Missus Khmelnytsky. “What do you do?”

“I'm a counselor of sorts. Not one of those headshrinkers that so confuse people and charge them a fortune to do so,” Bobby said. “I'd rather people be comfortable with themselves, and understand who they are from their own point of view.”

“You say you're a friend of Muriel's. She's an Ambassador. Are you one, too?”

“Yea, I got loaded with that. I don't let it bother me, though. I just do what I do. Oh, it's nice and all, being an Ambassador. I don't have to worry about earning a paycheck, for instance. And I get to go to some groovy places and meet new people,” he replied.

“So, why a kid's name? Why not Robert, or at least Bob?” she asked.

“Robert – yecch! Too formal. And Bob is something you do in a pool.” This got a snicker from Anna's mother. “Nope, just Bobby – the little, inoffensive guy that nobody suspects is intelligent,” he said with a self-deprecating grin. “And no, I don't want to change you, or 'improve' you. If you want that, you'll have to do it yourself. Nope, all I want to do is help you to understand these new things that your daughter and husband can do, and that you can do, too, if you want to.”



::Bobby?: sent Muriel.

::It's all right. Just too much, too fast. She isn't against these new abilities, just doesn't know what to do with them,:: he sent back. ::She just needs to get her feet back on the ground.::

“So, what do you do?” she asked.

“Mostly, just talk to people. I listen to what they have to say about their problems, and then help them take the problem apart so they can see how to solve it. Actually, it's much like the math problems you probably had in school, when you were growing up. The ones that seemed to be unsolvable because they seemed to be lacking information? But, if you took them one step at a time, doing the parts you knew how to do, the rest just seemed to fall into place,” he said. “I don't use fancy lingo, or esoteric theories. And I won't play games with your head. That's just wrong.”

“Since we moved,” she said, tentatively, “things have been so confusing.”

“Where were you from?” Bobby asked.

“The Ukraine. Zaporizhia. It's a city on the Dnieper river.”

“Does that have anything to do with the name that Anna and Boris shouted?” he asked.

“Yes. That was where the Zaporozhtsi came from, where they had their fort and Sich. Anna's always romanticized those Cossacks. And then she met that boy, and started to learn how to dance the old dances. Like a man,” she said.

“Ah. Not her place to learn them, huh?”

“No. It's barbaric, all that kicking and jumping,” she said. “It's undignified. And she could hurt herself.”

“Well,” Bobby said, “even barbarians had civilization and culture. Just not the same as the people around them. I've read a bit about the Zaporozhtsi Cossacks. Yes, they were warriors. But they were also farmers and herdsman. They had churches and schools. And they were caught between warring factions during a difficult time.”

“But they were so ruthless – such bloody conflicts.”

“Yes, and so were those that tried to destroy them. That they survived and moved their siches around from one place to another is amazing. And finally the Zaporozhtsi moved into the Kuban river area and changed their name. Now, they're respected. And that's what Boris and Viktor are a member of. So, they still exist,” Bobby said.

“But, why does SHE have to be one of them?”

"Hmm. Good question," Bobby said. "I think maybe it goes back to Muriel. When she was starting out, she had to compensate for her young age and gender, so she became outrageous. In fact, she was once introduced as 'the Outrageous Ambassador, Muriel', if I remember right."

"And Taylor, from Britain, was the next one. His knowledge of literature – some of it rather esoteric – led him to create what Britain calls the 'Jolly Greens'. All of them humans that have had the Envoy training, and military training. They were dressed in green, and were so outrageous that they rode ghost horses and grinned and laughed at themselves on parade. Hence the name they got."

"All of the head Ambassadors for the Enclaves have had their own style, and tried to incorporate something of the culture and tradition of the country. And they've been pretty successful. Chun was the latest, before your daughter came along. And your Anna broke the mold. Every other Ambassador has used some of the training in creating their outrageous persona."

"Your daughter is doing the opposite. She's learning to do dance and horseback riding the OLD way. And that gives people a subtle message. She's saying 'I don't need to resort to tricks or Envoy training'. And I think she's right. The uniforms, alone, are enough to show that. So, instead, she does something that anyone with training in dance or riding can do, and learning to do it well. Maybe better than anyone else. So, despite the uniform, it makes her more real to the people. And it connects with Russia's past," Bobby concluded.

"You really think so?" Anna's mother asked.

"No question in my mind. She's already done it," he replied. "Just her trying – just the demonstration she gave, trying out the uniform to be sure that it would work in dance – told people that she's just a normal girl doing a job. And that made her special to them. As special as she is to you. And someone that they're proud of."

"Oh . . . ,” she said. "Oh, I suppose I'd better learn to use the training, then."

"Well, that's up to you," Bobby replied. You could almost hear him say, '*Here, little fishy*', in his mind.

"Would . . . I mean, is there anyone that could teach me?"

"You have an Envoy guard, to help protect you. She's also a trainer – a teacher, if you will – as well as nurturer and protector. She'd be more than happy to help," he said.

"I just . . . I feel so helpless. It's like suddenly she knows a lot more than I do." she said.

"She does. If I know Betty, she handed Nika – Anna's security chief – a couple of PhDs along with the basics of the job to give her. You could have training the same way.

Again, your guard can help you with that," Bobby said.

"You did it, didn't you? I see why you keep the name Bobby. It makes you inoffensive, like you're just a kid," she said.

Bobby grinned, "Yep. Exactly. That way people concentrate on what's important, instead of trying to impress me." She laughed. "Right now, you feel that you've been separated from Anna. You haven't. Not really. Despite what she knows and what she's learned, there's still one thing that she hasn't learned, completely, yet. She's still learning how to be human. How her body works and why. How to deal with people."

"You know, they say boys belong to their father, and girls to their mother. But really, if a boy is smart, he learns from his mother. And a girl will learn from her father, too, because she looks up to him. And a girl learns from her mother how to be a girl and a woman. Not in what you say, but in what you do," Bobby said, reflectively.

"How do you know so much?" Missus Khmelnytsky asked.

"Oh, dear. OK, 'true confession' time. I've got degrees in psychology, and psychiatry – which means that I needed a medical degree, too. Human medical, though I have Envoy style medicine, too. And degrees in philosophy and religions. Hmm, six, altogether, I think," Bobby said.

"So, you're a doctor?"

"Nope. Just a counselor. Oops, missed one. Sociology. So, that's seven degrees. All equivalent to PhD degrees. Sociology and Envoy medicine are the most useful ones. The rest just told me that humans mostly got it wrong, but it did help to know them so I could see where the mistakes were," he added. "And I think you're coming back out of your introspection and beginning to feel more grounded."

"How did you know?"

"Oh, that. I can feel emotional pain. I'm drawn to it, really. That's why I got into counseling, and why I wanted to know how humans did it. I don't. Mostly what you needed was 'fill in the blanks'. The reasons why your daughter felt the need to resurrect an old Cossack clan. Or tribe. Kinda gray area, there," Bobby said. "So, now that you know, you don't feel so lost, and you know that your daughter still needs you, very much. You know, she can teach you, too, just as you teach her."

"Oh, I couldn't!" she said.

"Hi, Bobby." Fred and Lilly came up beside him. "I think it's our turn, now."

"Hi, Fred. OK, if you think so."

"I know so, sprout. Hi, Missus Khmelnytsky. I'm Fred White, and this is my wife, Lily.

We know what it is to raise a headstrong girl. Muriel's our daughter. And believe me, we've learned from her – or more precisely because of her. And she's learned from us. Especially Lily. As a result, we've become something that most generations don't have. We're friends. Come on, they don't need us around and I understand that Carla has created a coffee house and tea room, and it's staffed. We can sit and talk in comfort. They don't need us around for the rest of this.”

“Thank you, Bobby,” said Anna, quietly. “And I'll have to thank them, too. How did you know?”

“Oh, that. I can feel emotional pain. Much the way Fran can feel physical pain. I saw your uniform test, and wanted to learn more. And I can't stay around large crowds of people. Too much pain, and it grates on me. But I knew that your mother had some, so I made it a point of coming back when the crowds were gone,” he said. “So, I spent the time studying up on the Cossacks and that's when it hit me that your mother never realized why you chose them to emulate.”

“Well, the name helps. Back in history, the Khmelnytsky name belonged to one of the leaders of the Zaporozhtsi,” Anna said. “So, we really ARE from that old clan. What ma doesn't know is that I spent a lot of time doing research on it, myself, in the museum on the Khortytsia island in the middle of the river that runs through the middle of the city. It was easy to get to. That's where I met Boris.”

“So, what's with the war cry you two let out?” Bobby asked.

“Oh, that. He has a Zaporozhtsian name, too. And he recognized mine, of course. So it got to be a joke, when I'd show up, that he'd shout the name, and I'd return the shout. The troupe thought it was cute, and we never did it around civilians,” Anna said, and giggled. “I think I surprised him when my squads joined me in shouting it back.”

“I think it surprised him to see you there, and that you were the reason he'd been called out,” Bobby said. “Definitely good vibes from the man when he saw you. I do know that he's proud of you becoming an Ambassador, and even prouder that you would chose the uniform and want to learn the dancing and riding for real, and not using Envoy techniques.”

“Yea, well it's going to take a lot of work, but when we get done we'll be able to put on shows around the country, and draw people in that way,” Anna said. “I'd better get back to pa. He's as excited as a kid with a new toy over his office. Carla really knew what she was doing.”

“Yea, well she just asked Jeff what he would have wanted, then designed around that and some improvements that Chun and others had made,” Bobby said. “Oh, don't be surprised if Muriel's parents want to talk to you, too. They're good. Muriel really should upgrade their passports to Ambassador, they do so much. Well, I'll see you around. Take care, now.”

# Chapter 36

## Anna Takes Charge

### (Thursday)

“So, Nika, how's the recruiting going,” Anna asked as her security chief translated into her office.

“Great. Triple E is fully staffed with Envoys, right now, but we're beginning to recruit for it among humans. Some applicants don't want to take the training. Others don't want to work for an Envoy,” Nika said. “We're filling shops and restaurants as quickly as Carla's group puts them up. Lawyers . . . well, we've hit a snag with them.”

“Try catching the ones coming out of school,” Anna said. “They haven't learned any bad habits, yet, and don't have any secrets that they're afraid we'll find out. What about maintenance?”

“Oh, them. They're having a field day. They really enjoy your dad, and have shown him around everything, including the power converter and how it works. Your mom took Bobby's suggestion, too, and is learning more about shields and how to use them. And, I think she's started to become excited over what they can do.”

“I know. I got home last night and she was bubbling about the things her Envoy said she'd be able to do,” Anna said. “And she got her Envoy to teach her how to go deep and connect with her soul, to be able to use it to store courses. She's got two, already, and is thinking about a third. And she can use them, already.”

“Excuse us? Hello? Is Anna busy?” Fred and Lily appeared just inside the door, at Nika's desk.

“Mister and Missus White! Come in,” Anna said.

“Oh, please. Just Fred and Lily,” Fred said. “It's not like we're someone important, after all. And all Muriel's friends call us that. It made it easier on all of us. Come to think of it, maybe that's where Muriel got it from.”

“Well please come in,” Anna said, directing them to the casual area. “Can we get you something? Tea, coffee? Something more substantial? And why are you over here in the middle of the night for you?”

“Well,” said Fred, “I'll admit that this is a bit of a stretch for us. But we thought it would be a good idea to talk to you, after talking to your mother. She is a fine woman.”

“I know. And a good mother. I didn't realize that she felt separated from me because of all that happened until Bobby showed up and talked to her,” Anna said. “I know, I should

be more observant. But this is a bit new to me, too, and Muriel did rather take me by storm. And Carla was just as bad. I've talked to ma since then, and assured her that she still has much to teach me, and I still love her dearly."

"Ah, good. Then maybe we needn't have come."

"Oh, please! Come any time. I'm sure I can learn from you how to help her over the rough spots," Anna said. "I know her Envoy is teaching her things. And I've tried to tell her that she's welcome to come to here, to see what I do, or just to talk. I think she thinks it would be an imposition."

"Ah. Well, we know that feeling. It took Lily and I some time before we understood that, despite Muriel having a job to do, she would always welcome us. And it would take something major to make her miss an appointment with us for dinner, or such," Fred said.

"Now, that's something I haven't tried. I know there are restaurants here, and that I should visit them from time to time. Having them with me would be good. Hmm. I wonder if I could get pa to suggest a night out, sometimes. Maybe that would draw her out," Anna said.

"Good idea. Very good."

"Even if you did manage to sneak in that suggestion," Anna giggled, and they both joined her. "I begin to see what you do for Muriel. I think it's called 'smoothing the way', or some such."

"Yes, well, we try. Sometimes it helps to have older folks talk about the training and family matters, and how to be supportive," Lily said. "And we like meeting new people."

"Mmm. Yes. You're suggesting to me that I should try to find a position for her. I'm not sure I can. You made your own, by seeing a need and filling it," Anna said. "I think she'll have to find herself before we can look in that direction. But I'll definitely keep it in mind."

"Fred, dear, I think she's too smart for us," Lily said.

"Lily, dear," Anna said, "You've suggested things that I hadn't considered, so don't try to build me up to something that I'm not." And she grinned. "So, what else should I be thinking about?"

"I think you've got it covered, for the time being. No one can really tell until you come up against your first crises," Fred said.

"Well, I won't keep you from your rest," Anna said. "I know I can call on Muriel and her friends. And you've just told me I can call on you with questions. I'll just keep in mind the time zones, and not wake you"

"Oh, wake us, if it's important. We'll understand," Lily said. "And we can get here in minutes if we need to."

"Thank you. You don't know how much this means to me," Anna said. "I expect, though, that most times I'd need you would be in the afternoon or evening. It might be early morning for you."

"Doesn't matter. It isn't like it would be all the time," Lily said. "Or even often. You've got a good support team, and they know how to 'suggest' things to you. And you're quick and direct, which is needed for this job you've taken on."

"Humph. I didn't have any choice. I was dumped into it whether or not. It helps that I'm enjoying it, though. So, go," Anna said, in a kindly way. "I've taken up enough of your evening. I know how to reach you if I need to. I'll try to involve ma, somehow. And I'll keep an eye on pa, too. This was as much a surprise to him as it was to me. When you came in I was going over resources with Nika. Mostly lawyers, Triple E, and maintenance. So, I'll add to it questions concerning my ma and pa, and how to get them involved in this side of it. Nika's a good organizer, and good at reminding me of what I'm forgetting. We'll get this covered."

Fred laughed, "Well, as long as you're sure things are covered . . . ."

"No, I'm not sure," Anna said, "but I'm getting there, and Nika's helping me, and she's got the training from Bart and Mata. So, between us, I don't think there'll be any surprises from this side. And Enclave will pretty much run itself. I'm more worried about what from outside will affect us. But we won't know until it happens, and when it does I know who to holler to for help. So, I think we're as ready as we can be, at this point. I do want to thank you for thinking about ma. And for coming out and talking with her. I think it's helped some. She doesn't seem so anxious all the time. I'll talk to her Envoy, too, and see how we can coordinate things to make the transition smoother for her."

"Now, that's one I hadn't thought of, and should have," said Fred.

"Uh, huh. You just hadn't found a way to work it in the conversation, most likely," Anna said, and Fred laughed.

"You're right on that," he replied. "But, it looks like the Russian President wants to see you, so we'll get out of here."

"Safe trip back. And thanks for coming and offering your help," Anna said. Fred and Lily translated out, and Anna turned to Sergei, standing by Nika's desk. "Hi, Sergei. Come in. Can I offer you tea?"

"Oh, thank you," he replied as he took a seat in her casual area. "So, young lady, now that you've got your own office in your own Enclave, how are you going to turn my life upside down?"

"I'm not. I've got enough problems trying to figure out my own life," she said. "Besides, you're a big boy, now. You don't need anyone telling you where to go and what to do." Sergei

laughed.

“Yes,” he said, “but I've never had an Ambassador from a whole world to deal with, before.”

“No different than dealing with one from a country, for the most part,” Anna said. “However, you have raised an interesting point. Other Ambassadors. I should probably put on some sort of 'casual' party or something to introduce myself to them. Not that I'd be dealing with them, for the most part. I'd probably be dealing mostly with my counterparts in other countries. I'd of course invite you and whoever you felt would most benefit from your government.”

“Oh, now that's a nice idea. Any idea when?”

“I'll have to let you know. Certainly not until the Enclave is finished, which should be about a week. After that, well, we'd have to see when everyone is free. And I'd set it up so that we could give them time to walk around and see the sites before the party. Sergei,” she added seriously, “I'm not an ogre. I'm not going to try to manipulate you or use you for my purposes. However, I think you should know, I'm not going to allow you to use me, either. We've gotten along so far, mostly because things weren't set in place. But now, we have a treaty that spells out the privileges and responsibilities of both parties. There's a lot we can do to help you, and some that you can do to help us. But I'm not going to bolster your government. I think you realize that. What we did the other day was NOT to bolster your government but was, AT YOUR REQUEST, the arrest of individuals suspected of treasonous activities. That it involved members of the government is unfortunate. But it sent a clear warning to whoever managed to get them into office that you're not going to put up with treason. The rest is up to you.”

“I know that, Anna. And I respect what you're saying.” Sergei was unusually serious with this point. “You may be young, but you've made it very clear that you're not going to allow me to run rough-shod over you. And I won't.” He sighed. “I think what the problem is is that I don't really know what you're going to do.”

“Oh, that's easy. I'm going to find people to train. I'm going to help with emergencies. I'm going to try to help people understand that trained people are still people, and that Home isn't something to be afraid of,” Anna said. “And I'm going to interface with the government on various levels to solve any frictions between us. We're not here to take over, Sergei, we're here to be friendly and helpful.”

“And outrageous,” he said with a half grin.

“Well, yes. That goes without saying. We put on a show for people. And that makes us look less dangerous,” she said, smiling.

“You're implying that you ARE dangerous,” he said.

“Of course,” Anna said. “It's the human condition. Training doesn't stop that. It does



control it, however. We aren't going to go around killing people just because we don't like them. That would go against the balance. We can, however, defend ourselves. If you've seen some of the things that Muriel went through, then you know that. Or even what Taylor did in China. Or what Chun did to the PRC government. We can and will defend ourselves against attack. It's not something that I like to contemplate. But by the same token, it's not something that I'll hold back from. In an attack you will see me in front of my troops, in formals, doing what's necessary to defend ourselves."

"Well," Sergei said, with a whoosh of expelled air. "That puts it plain. Am I allowed to tell others what you told me?"

"Of course. Just don't make us out as a ravaging horde, please," Anna said. "But we are like any other human being in that respect. We will defend ourselves. Oh, and before you ask, Envoys can't kill as a general rule. They can, under orders, but the orders have to come from a human that has the Envoy training and balance. Taylor didn't have that question. All his troops are human. Muriel's been through it, in a sense. And often used her friends as troops rather than use Envoys. I don't have that luxury. Yet. I may, but that's in the future and only as a possibility. Right now, there are only three resident humans in this Enclave. And only one that actually has come to the realization of how dangerous we are."

"How did Chun deal with it?" he asked.

"She didn't. She killed the PRC government herself. She didn't even ask her squads to destroy the building. She did that, too. Then her squads and Carla built her office," Anna replied.

"Oh. I didn't realize that."

"She's a very strong woman, Sergei. Quiet. Almost fades into the background. But just as outrageous as the rest of us Ambassadors, and just as capable. And, maybe, more determined and committed than some. She's had a hard life under a hard regime. Her solutions may come off as being hard as a result. But she's in tune with her balance. She gave the PRC government the opportunity to step down and recognize that they were no longer in power. They refused to even consider it. Refused to understand that they were wrong to attempt to assassinate Muriel. They were still trying to figure out how to take back control. They'd judged themselves and they remained a threat. One that she eliminated, much like you'd eliminate a rat in your house."

"I see young Boris over there, by your security chief's desk," Sergei said, gratefully changing the subject. He'd just been hammered by a sweet, little girl, into understanding that she was more deadly than an army.

"Yea, he's going to torture me some more," Anna said. And at Sergei's questioning look added, "Dance lesson. He knows that other things can take priority over it. But he still gets impatient, sometimes. He's young, he'll get over it."

"HE'S young!" Sergei roared with laughter. "From you this comes? You are younger

than he is.”

“Don't tell him that. He might think he's in charge. You know how men are,” Anna replied.

Sergei, still chuckling and shaking his head, said, “Ah, little Anna. You are a wicked, wicked girl. And I fear for what you will be like when you get older. No man will be safe around you. You'll cut them down to size with your words.”

“Of course,” Anna said, matter-of-factly but with a smile. “That's what women are for. To keep men in their place.

Sergei left, still laughing, and only stopped long enough to say to Boris, “Don't ever cross her, my young friend. Already, she can cut a man to ribbons with her words, and have you enjoying it.” He was still laughing as he went out the door.

# Chapter 37

## Aftermath

(Friday morning)

“Morning Fred.”

“Good morning, Muriel. How did it go?”

“Well. VERY well. We now have an Ambassador to Russia, and a new Enclave.”

Fred's face lit up in a smile. “That's wonderful.”

“Yes, and we got to meet with a lot of the national leaders and feel them out on various subjects, and everyone was cordial. Amazingly so, since some of them had been at each other's throats for years. The signing went well, too, but that was almost anti-climatic from my point of view compared to the rest. So, anything new, here?”

“Not really. Everyone knew you were out, so they probably stored up their emergencies until you got back. Oh, and Taylor contacted me and left a message. He'd like you to do a statue of him like yours. It seems that kids have been asking why he didn't have one.”

“I'll get with him on that one. Right now, I need coffee. Too many days of inverted times. Morning Mata,” Muriel added as she went past her security chief's desk.

“Morning, young lady. So glad that you could join us poor, working folks,” Mata replied with a grin.

“Oh, don't, Mata. You don't have the problem of lugging around a physical body that gets used to a particular time to do things, and gets tired.”

“Have you seen the news?” Mata asked, changing the subject.

“Nope. I just got up, as you so eloquently reminded me.”

“They're at it again in the UN. Mostly Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan. Egypt is waffling, but I think they'll join the others. Others that have a high Muslim population are doing 'me, too's', but not necessarily meaning it. They're trying to use oil to pressure others into joining them, of course.”

“Are they still calling us abominations?” asked Muriel.

“Of course. And against nature and the laws of god. We've alerted all the Enclaves and suggested that any dangerous materials be kept outside, and contained in an inside-out

shield. It's pretty easy to rig a shield to create another shield like that, so it would be instantaneous. You just tell the sensors what to look for, and what to do when it encounters them," Mata said.

"I didn't know they could do that."

"Neither did I. The head of maintenance came up with it. He said that shields are actually semi-intelligent, and can be trained. So, we trained ours and put the word out on how to do it. All the Enclaves have that, now," Mata said. "Even Anna's."

"Well, that's good. You're expecting action, aren't you," Muriel said. It was a statement.

"Yep. Probably in the next week. The President's been alerted, and he's pushing Congress to make ANY hate crime, and he's including everything from wall scrawls to suicide attacks under that umbrella, to be a federal offense. The difference between what he's pushing for and what exists now is the authorization to back trace to the group, and hold them ALL responsible. Considering that national leaders are also at risk, I'd say that's a good move," Mata said.

"Have the other countries been alerted to that? I'd hate to lose some of them," Muriel said, thinking of Sergei.

"Oh, yea. Most are taking it seriously. To the point where there's a resolution in the UN that they're trying to pass that would make it an international violation. Both of them look to pass without any problems."

"Hmm. Sounds like the rabidly Muslim countries are not making any points with the rest of the world."

"Well, they didn't like that you spoiled their fun and put them in a bad light with that Embassy rescue. So, you see, it's all your fault." Muriel just snickered at that.

"How about that!" Muriel said, "I've got a geological rift named after me. It's my fault." Mata just groaned.

"How long have you been storing that one up?" Mata asked.

"Why, Mata! You cut me to the quick. How could you ever think that I'd actually store some pun up ahead, and wait for the opportunity to use it?" Muriel asked innocently.

"Maybe because you do that," Mata replied, not falling for the innocent look.

"OK, serious, now," Muriel said. "Can we step up production of vehicles and power converters?"

"We're pushing it now. Remember, we keep getting resistance from utility companies

and oil companies about what we're doing. Especially in this country," Mata said. "Something about not doing it in the American way."

"In other words, not doing it in a way that they can make scads of money off of it while providing the minimum they can get away with in service or safety. I'm not buying it," Muriel said. "And maybe we need to start a campaign to show that the utilities and oil companies are un-American."

"How?"

"Through cutouts. Media pieces written by people not known to be associated with us," Muriel said. "Pieces that outline just where all the money goes, and how, by using products produced in conjunction with Enclaves, the population can save money and have better service and safety."

"That's a thought. Run it past your legal team, and see what they say," Mata said.

"I'll do that. Hi, Jeff. What's up?" Muriel asked as her friend came bouncing into her office.

"He did it! He simplified the system and made it easier to build. I didn't think anyone could!" The words just seemed to pour out of Jeff's mouth.

"Whoa, slow down. Sit down and start from the beginning," Muriel said.

Jeff took several deep breaths, then began again. "Anna's father. He put a car in his office maintenance bay and started taking it apart. Looking at how everything was done. He even took apart the power converter. I understand that he had the head of maintenance in there with him. So, they looked at what was done, and how it was done, and started experimenting. What he found out simplified the power converter and reduced its size by half. So, he did some further experimentation and discovered that there is a limit to how much power a converter can put out as electricity for any given size of converter."

"OK," Muriel said, "I can see where that would be nice, but not why it would be so earth shaking that you'd come in here so excited."

"Oh, it's what he did next. He made a converter the size of two 'D' cell batteries, and with the same sort of connection, and put it in a flashlight. And it worked. He tried different sizes and powers, and found that batteries could be replaced by power converters that never run out. He can literally replace any battery for anything that's portable, including laptop computers, media players, TV remote controls, anything! And that's not all he did."

"OK, go on."

Jeff took another deep breath then began, "he solved the gearing and transmission problem."

"I didn't know there WAS a problem with them," Muriel said.

"That's just it! I didn't know, either. But, really, I wasn't thinking. I built the first car based on the way that they'd been done forever," he said, waiving his hands about. "So, he just thought 'why?' Then played around with shields and found that he could get them to do the gearing and transmission action without all the gears. He even did away with the electric motor to drive the car. It's all done with shields!"

"Sounds like it's all done with mirrors," Muriel quipped.

"No, no! He found out that if you tell a shield to spin at a certain rate, it will. And it'll keep on spinning. You can vary the speed of the spin, you can tell it to convert one speed to another, even over a wide range. And you can do this right at the wheels, so there's no bulky motor driving the car, and no drive shaft. Totally independent suspension, because there's no axles the way cars have them now," Jeff said, regaining his original excitement. "Not only that, but he cross connected the shields, so that when you need to have all the wheels going at the same speed – in four wheel drive it used to be called locking the hubs – the shields will automatically do it, and drop out of that state when no longer needed."

"Oh, my. So he bested you, huh?" asked Muriel.

"To heck with that! I don't care if he bested me, he created a whole new way of doing things, and it opens up possibilities all over the place," Jeff said. "He's passed the information back to me, and to anyone else that's working with car manufacturers. I've got the lawyers slapping patents on the process, now."

"Can you do that? He invented it," Muriel asked.

"Work for hire. And he understands that. Plus, with the salary and benefits package we give employees he's better off doing it that way. Once it's patented we'll put it out on vehicles. He gets his name on the patent, and we get the assignment of rights. This should revolutionize the way that vehicles are built," Jeff said.

"Again," Muriel added. "You already revolutionized it once, already. Does he realize what he's done?"

"OH! YEA! I made sure of that. He tried to put it down to just playing around, seeing how things worked. You know, 'no big thing' sort of attitude. But he found my original mistake in trying to build the way they had always been built, instead of trying to work it out as a whole new problem. I won't make that mistake again," Jeff said. "Oh, I may go through an 'improve on existing' phase with something. But then I'll take a second look, and ask myself if there's another way of doing it."

"Well, it certainly looks like he's fitting in, here," Muriel said.

"Well, I can see why they discriminated against him. Most companies work on the principle of 'if some thing's working, don't change it'. That's fine, until something comes along

that is better. It's the old problem of 'it's not traditional' all over again," Jeff said. "But, since we're non-traditional, it's good with us."

A loud crash followed by an extremely loud bang couldn't fail to catch Muriel attention. Mata was already ahead of her. "Main gate," said Mata, and they translated out. Sure enough, there was a smoke filled bubble at the main gate. A probe inside the shield determined that it had once been a car. As the smoke cleared and the car became visible, it was obvious that the remains of a man were still at the wheel. Muriel quickly set up curtain shields around the car to keep gawkers from staring at the body.

"Mata, how many others got hit?" Muriel asked, as she examined the wreckage. It took some time for the answer to arrive.

"All of them. We got the shields reconfigured just in time," Mata said. "Police are scrambling everywhere."

"Lock it down. This happened on Home property, Home takes the lead in the investigation. I want to know as much about these people as is possible, and the same for the explosives and detonators. I want to know who owned the cars. And I want kids shielded from seeing the bodies. OH, SHOOT!" Muriel exclaimed. "Anna. She shouldn't see something like this."

"Too late. She's already sending a report back to your on-duty squad. According to the squad, she's being very professional about it," Mata said.

"Somebody monitor the media. The perpetrators may want to take credit for the 'massive destruction of property belonging to the abomination'," Ted said from behind Muriel.

"Won't work. Too many groups are anxious to take credit for something that somebody else does," Muriel replied. "Somebody canvas Home, and see if you can find these peoples souls. Maybe we can catch a break that way."

"On it," shouted Caleb. "Zeb Carter grabbed them before they could suicide, and is trying to get sense out of them."

"I need to see how Anna's doing," Muriel said.

"Her mother's got her. She's throwing up. She got all the way through the report, then started vomiting. Tough little girl," Mata said. "Oh, and her mother says to stay here. Once Anna's straightened out, she'll be back to work. Not a hint of 'it's your fault' in the send. Just pride in and concern for her daughter."

"Are the governments complying with my hands off edict?" asked Muriel.

"For the most part. Some of them had to be physically restrained to get them to understand that we meant it. Some of the newer ones. The rest realize that we can get more information than they can, and faster, too," Ted said. Muriel looked at him. "I'm catching this

through the security chiefs network,” he said. “All the Enclave Envoys are grim. And they’re all taking it personally.”

“Do we have anything yet?” asked Muriel.

“Working on it. Fred has taken descriptions and names, where we could get them. No common ethnicity. Mostly low level criminals from the IDs and the few finger prints we could get. Looks like throw-aways,” Mata said. “Cars were all stolen, and we’re trying to find out when and from where, and who owns them. Maintenance has the bomb and detonator fragments and is trying to come up with a commonality. But don’t count on it through so many countries. Oh, maintenance says that the detonators were all cell phones. The type you can get with prepaid minutes. Throw-aways. Untraceable.”

“Muriel . . . .”

“Uh, uh, Melanie. OUR investigation. Every one of these happened on Home property. You’re welcome to help, of course. Your expertise is always appreciated. But this is our baby, this time,” Muriel said.

“He’s not going to be happy,” Melanie said.

“You think WE are? Come on, Melanie, we both know that if this got into the system it would be bungled. We’ve got the manpower, we’ve got the communications, we’ve got abilities that regular investigators can’t even imagine. The property starts at the street, so don’t give me any ‘but it’s a parking lot’ stuff. OUR baby.”

“OK, OK, calm down. What can I do to help, then.”

“Beyond telling me what we’re missing in the investigation? Not much,” Muriel said.

“How much damage was there?”

“None, in any of the Enclaves,” Muriel responded.

“Any of . . . how many were hit?”

“ALL of them,” Muriel said, grimly

“Fred’s coming in with something. According to the times, and accounting for time zones, all the explosions happened in a one minute period,” Mata said.

“One minute . . . ,” said Muriel.

“Satellite!” Muriel and Melanie shouted, together. “Jack!” Melanie said and sent, “Satellite transmission between 11:07 and 11:09 EDT, plus minus. What satellite, and if you can, who sent it.”



“Have him check web pages. If it's what I think it is, then it's a radical religious group, and they probably put up a page with a particular hymn or phrase being repeated, over and over. And we can just hope that the page is still up,” Muriel said.

“Mata, can maintenance figure out what the last thing the phones were doing was?” asked Muriel.

“Already on it, when you said satellite. He's got a page, and he's sending the information to Melanie,” Mata said.

# Chapter 38

## Investigation (Friday afternoon)

"So, where are we?" Muriel said. The mess had been cleaned up, the body was sent to the morgue for relatives to claim, and she, Ted, Mata, Melanie, Caleb and, of all people, Zeb Carter were seated in her office.

"I've got nothing. The drivers were too traumatized to be able to say anything coherently. I've got names. I turned them over to my daughter. But that's all I've got. The souls suicided. Sorry," Zeb said.

"Sergeant Carter, you, of ALL people have nothing to be sorry for. You did what you could with the material at hand, and it's just too bad that the material wasn't very much to begin with," Muriel said.

"Yea, well, I suppose I ought to get back before I get too used to this life," he said with a grin. "There's still people that need me. Melanie, I'll see you the next time you're there. OK?"

"OK, dad. Thanks for coming, though. We'll follow the names and see if we can come up with anything from this end. I doubt it, though. They probably only saw one person, the one that paid them," Melanie said. "Like Muriel says, throw-aways." Zeb stood up and translated out.

"Caleb? Anything you can offer?" asked Muriel.

"Only my support. I was acting as the earthly side of Zeb. Then he decided to come here, himself. Shocked the heck out of me, I don't mind telling you. I didn't think he'd EVER leave until his daughter had joined him."

"Ted, what about you? You were in contact with Maintenance," she asked.

"Nothing more than you know. Cell phones to a web page, otherwise generic and specific to the country, or one nearby. Same with the explosives. About three different grades, but all common to the area. The best we can determine, they were stolen, like the cars."

"OK, Melanie?"

"Muriel, we got the satellites, the web pages, the web designer – but he doesn't know anything. He was paid to do a job, and that's it. He hadn't been into that site for three months. Somebody uploaded a page, or whatever, and it was some signal on the page that triggered the phones."

"Hi, all! Why the long faces?"

"Hi, Zeb. Jeez! Two Zebs in one day," said Muriel.

"Two Zebs . . . you mean Carter was here? And I missed him? Crap. Most I've done is see him in passing. He's busier than a one armed paperhanger with hives."

"Zeb, you're starting to sound like Tex," Melanie said.

"Yea, well, that's where I've been spending my leave. That guy is crazy."

"We know. But we love him anyway," Melanie said. "So, why are you here?"

"Oh, the Commander said I should get over here, fast. We picked up some 'fishing trawler' off the coast that looked suspicious. They were just sitting there, and no nets out. One guy, when we boarded we found him in the galley with a laptop. Had a web page up, and was doing something," Zeb said.

"Did you get the URL? And can you tell us anything about the guy?" asked Muriel, trying to hide her excitement.

"Yea, the URL, I've got it here, somewhere. Oh, here it is," he said, and handed her a piece of paper. Muriel handed it to Melanie. "The guy looked middle eastern. He had this website up, and was just shouting 'go, go, go', and there was a high pitched squeal."

"It's the website," Melanie said. "He was the trigger man. Do you still have ahold of him?"

"Yea. What's going on?" Zeb asked.

"The Enclaves were hit. All of them, all at the same time. Signal from a satellite, or actually more than one, because they covered the earth. To cell phones acting as detonators. Any chance we can get this guy for a little while?" asked Muriel.

"I'd have to check with the boss, but I don't see why not. Who's lead?"

"I am," said Muriel. "Home property, Home investigation."

"Jeez, you mean I might have got the guy that sent the trigger?" asked Zeb.

"Yep. That's what we want to find out. And who he's working for," said Muriel. "Oh, did you log the time that you saw him at the computer?"

"Well, I've got it on the record. I didn't log until we had him in custody," Zeb said. "We wouldn't even have done that, but the boss said to bring him in. Well, all of them, really."

“Why?”

“Oh, their papers weren't right. The name of the boat? Wasn't the same on the papers. Nor was the description or the owner's name. Usually means something shady is going on,” Zeb said.

“Zeb, I'm sorry to have to tell you this, but I'm about to go over your head,” Muriel said. “Melanie, can you reach the President and request that we have full access to the boat and it's crew. AND this possible trigger man?”

“Sure. Hold on.” Melanie looked thoughtful for a minute, then turned back to Muriel and said, “It should be there before you are. Just one thing – I've got to go with you as his representative.”

“OK, what's the catch?”

“I've got to be the one to ask the questions,” Melanie said.

“Melanie, you KNOW that you aren't allowed to use the methods that we have available,” Muriel said.

“Yes. I know. I can only ask questions. Of course, you can be in the room while I'm asking,” she replied, and the corners of her mouth quirked up.

“Ah, well, I suppose that would have to do, then,” Muriel backpedaled, quickly. So, let's go.” Zeb took them directly to the man's cell, and Muriel quietly pegged his mind to 'truthful'. In seconds he was telling everything he knew about the operation, the people that hired him, where he was from, who he was, what religion he was, and what he had for breakfast. No coercion was necessary, and no threats or violence were used against the man. Having gotten all they could, they turned toward the crew, and Muriel quietly unstuck the man's mind.

“I thought that went pretty well,” Muriel said.

“Yes, surprisingly cooperative,” Melanie replied, raising an eyebrow toward Muriel. “I doubt that we'll get anything from the crew. Local hire and such. But we'll go through all the motions. What I'm eager to see is the paperwork and the ship.”

Sure enough, the crew was nowhere near as cooperative as the trigger man had been. They did find some inconsistencies in their stories, and picked at them a bit. But even their inconsistencies were consistent – they refused to budge from their stories. The paperwork and the ship, however, were another matter. The paperwork was all in order, and all absolutely fictitious. No boat by that name and description was registered anywhere within a hundred miles of where it had been found. The search was stretched out, going simply on the name, and they finally found it off the coast of Florida. A quick phone call to the local police determined that the ship had been declared missing, presumed lost at sea, four years before.

Then there was the boat, itself. Certainly it looked like a normal fishing trawler. Until

you boarded it. It's fascinating what you can find behind a loose wall panel. It's educational how many wall and floor panels one can place in a boat like that. And as for the contents of those wall and floor panels, well let's just say that the crew would be away for a long time on drug trafficking and possession of stolen property charges. Oh, and piracy. A check of the registry for the boat showed that the captain and crew were not the men in the cells. The boat and its unusual cache had been stolen, pirated at sea, by the current crew. Zeb was smiling all the way back to the Commandant.

As Zeb related the events, the Commandant simply looked at Muriel, skeptically. For her part, Muriel returned his gaze with a sweet, smiling, innocent face. She even offered him a CD record of the events which, as it so happened, just happened to start after Muriel had adjusted the man's mind to truthfulness, and ended just before she returned it to normal. Then went on to the interrogation of the crew and the search of the ship. Funny thing about that. But, since the record had been made by Mata, and everyone knew that Envoys couldn't lie, it was presumed to be a valid record. Another copy of that same CD was sent to the President. A third was sent to Fred for analysis.

Back in Muriel's office, Melanie said, "I've NEVER had an interrogation like that. What did you do?"

"ME! Why would I do anything?" asked Muriel, innocently. "Besides, if you don't know, then all you can say is that you conducted the interrogation and we watched."

"Tell, girl," Melonie growled.

"OK, I encouraged him to tell the truth, and only the truth," Muriel said.

"How?"

"Well, imagine, when you look at a person's mind, that you see a meter with false on one side and true on the other. Pin the needle to the 'true' side. Then the person can't lie," Muriel said.

"Did you leave him that way?"

"Of course not! What do you take me for?" asked Muriel.

"We'll leave that aside for now. OK, so what we got was the truth. Was that what you meant when you said that you had ways of getting information that I wasn't allowed to use?" asked Melanie.

"Well . . . yes. Among others. It didn't hurt him. Honest. And it's better than other methods, like going in after the information. Honest. And he won't be able to say that he didn't tell us anything. Honest."

"If I believed you were honest I wouldn't be asking questions," Melanie said. "So, where does that leave me?"

"The same place you always were," Muriel said. "You behaved in an entirely proper manner, in accordance with the laws of your country and the rules of your boss. If it comes to it, and it shouldn't unless you let the cat out of the bag, you can always blame me."

"I might have to."

"If it helps, I did NOT influence his answers. I DID influence him to tell the truth. There's a difference," Muriel said. "You want proof? Remember what he said when you asked him his name? Now, look at what he told Zeb when HE asked him, and what his identification said," Muriel said, getting a little testy.

Melanie thought for a minute, then grabbed Zeb's transcription of his record, paged through, and her eyes widened. "Son-of-a- . . . . The guys a player."

"Yep. I wasn't sure until you asked him his name. THEN I knew we might have a key."

"OK, I take back about half of what I was thinking about you," Melanie said. "I can use this. And I think it will deflect the President from asking too many questions. And you're right, you didn't hurt him, so you can't be charged with torture."

"You want torture? Think what would have happened if I'd dumped him on Judgment Square."

Melanie shuddered. "No thanks. The last time I was in Home to talk to dad, someone came in and suicided. It was awful. Come to think of it, that might be why he came here to talk to us. He knew how it affected me. He said that he tries to help them past it. But some just can't be helped."

"I know," said Muriel. "I've seen a few. I've seen the ones that were helped, and I've seen the ones that couldn't accept the help. It's not pretty, and it's one of the reasons that we're trying to get the population of earth trained. It doesn't have to be that way, if they just let the balance be their guide. And the reason it's this bad is because of the parasite that took over Home for so long."

"So, where's that leave us?" asked Melanie.

"Picking threads," Muriel replied. "What so much of your job entails. Following leads, trying to find out a pattern, a first cause, the source of all this hate. We may not find it this time, but eventually we will. And when we do, you can believe that Home will act."

"What are you going to do? Declare war on them?"

"War was already declared. You saw that. These people aren't civilized, Melanie. They're power and money happy. They want the world to bow to them and serve them as slaves. In other words, another form of bully," Muriel said. "There is a conflict of cultures that started this. The Jews versus the Muslims. Whose fault? Who knows? Who cares? It

started so long ago that it's doubtful that it will ever be straightened out. Both sides blame the other."

"But now," she went on, "it's grown out of proportion. The United States of America is seen as the 'Great Satan', and despised. While, at the same time, the Muslim countries do their best to sell oil to America. Our ways are not their ways. We believe in freedom, where they believe in control and slavery – especially of women. Oh, not all of them. There are Muslims that haven't listened to the propaganda of the radicals. They are people that just want to make a living, be with their families, be respected, things like that. These are not the people that disturb me. These are people that should have the opportunity to live and grow in peace."

"No," Muriel said, "the ones that are doing this are the radicals. They are the ones that push the idea of this being some sort of holy war, in order to seduce the less educated into a martyrdom of suicide. And you heard Zeb. They were not martyred. They suicided in soul death because of what they had done or tried to do. A once proud people that valued education has been reduced to ignorance by radicals that want to control them, have power over them."

"No, it's not the little people that I'm after," Muriel concluded. "I'm after the ones that are actually causing the violence. The leaders and those that have become so corrupted by the leaders that they would do anything, any violence, any aggression against people that have done them no wrong. They declared war on me. They declared war on the Children of Home by their actions. And I will see to it that they learn what war with Home is really like. They have traded eternity for one brief lifespan of what they think is glory. Instead of seventy two hours, they get all their wrongs crashing down on them, and they can't take it."

"Jeez, girl. Don't hold back. Tell me what you really think," Melanie said.

Muriel laughed. "OK, you got me. I do tend to be a bit vocal over this. Sorry."

"Well, actually, I agree with you. Or, at least, mostly. I think I'd have to analyze it to see if it actually fits my beliefs," Melanie said. "So, where do we go from here?"

"We try to find the source. I really doubt that we'll get close to the top with this incident, though maybe we can shake them up, some. Partly, because I think that the rabid radicals and the terrorists have been lumped together, and I don't think they really are. But until we can discover the organization – or lack of it – and its actual purpose I don't think we'll be able to say for sure who the bad guys are," Muriel said.

## Chapter 39

Detoxification  
(Friday evening)

"Mata, did we ever get a record of the aerial entrance of everyone into the signing building?" asked Muriel.

"Yea, I think so," Mata replied. "Just a minute . . . Yea, here it is. Why?"

"You said that Taylor wanted a statue of him. I need a model to work from, and I was thinking of using that pose of his when he stood up in the saddle of a ghost horse, and started the stampede of his troops into Cossack riding," Muriel said. "I need something to do to detox. And I'm not doing any good on the investigation. It beats sitting here fidgeting and being nervous."

"So, you need something to take your mind off it?"

"Yea," Muriel replied. "Something that will engage me."

"OK, I think I can give you a couple of views. Would that help? Then you wouldn't have to go digging for them."

"Oh, that would be great!"

"OK, give me a minute." Mata put in a DVD and scanned to the area where Taylor and his troops came in. She found one view that showed him head on, and saved it out as a file, then scanned further and found a side view of the same pose, and saved that out. She then copied them to a CD and handed it to her. "Those are the best that I can do," she said.

"Thanks. Any reason for me to stay down here?" Muriel asked.

"Not that I can think of. Go get supper and see what you can do for him," Mata replied. Muriel promptly translated to her apartment.

"About time, young lady," Chuck said. "I thought I was going to have to come down and get you."

"Nothing like that, Chuck. I wasn't doing any good down there, so I asked Mata for a couple of views of Taylor when he stood up in the saddle of the ghost horse."

"So, you're going to work on that while you eat?"

"Well, I'd thought about it."

"Well," he said in disgust, "I'll help you, but only on condition that you eat. Look, I know



what you're trying to do. You're frustrated, and need something to take your mind off it. OK, I can appreciate that. But you still have to eat," he said. "Put the views up on the screen, and let's take a look at them.

Muriel went to her recliner and put the images that Mata had saved up on screen, side by side. Chuck put her meal on the stand beside the chair, and picked up the keyboard that was attached to the computer. He fiddled with that and the mouse for a bit, then suddenly there were three images on the screen.

"I thought I'd put this on your computer when I was installing your software," he said. "This is one of the programs that Jeff came up with, when he was doing all that playing with game graphics. When we got the new computers that he designed, I remembered that Frank had given you that dump of how to carve and sculpt his way. I thought this might help." He fiddled a bit more, then suddenly, all the background and extraneous elements in the new graphic disappeared.

"Still not right," he said, and fiddled a bit more. Suddenly, the image on the far right seemed to jump out at her. "That's better. Wish I'd played with this program more. I wouldn't be taking this long. Hold on, it's almost there."

"Almost there! It looks three dimensional," Muriel exclaimed.

"Almost. Not quite. Something is out of sync," he said. Then muttered, "Come on. Where is that command. AH! Got it." And the image sharpened up even more. "OK," he said, "I can see you're going to have a problem with it. You're not eating, girl."

"Yes, I am," she replied, stuffing another mouthful in. "Honest! But what you're doing is fascinating, too."

"Yea, well I'll get it right in a second. THERE!" and the image began to slowly rotate, using Taylor as the central axis. And Muriel could see what the problem was. The horse was in a gallop, and all four feet were off the ground.

She thought for a second, then said, "What if we put an invisible shield under the horse, so it would support the statue?"

"Yea, that might do it. Can you pull the image off the screen? I mean, create an image and turn it into shields from this?"

"I think so. Can I stop eating for a second to concentrate?" she asked, like a little kid.

"Oh . . . I guess so," he said, chuckling.

Muriel concentrated for a couple of minutes, then created an image in front of her that seemed to match the rotating graphic on screen. She firmed the shields up, keeping the colors the same but making them opaque, and the proto-statue seemed to take shape as an entity of its own. Quickly, so that it wouldn't take too much time, she created a ground-plane

under the horse with irregular edges, then erected a shield from that to the belly of the horse, and turned it invisible. Chuck placed another stand on the other side of her, and she put her preliminary effort over on that, and quickly went back to eating.

"Is that it?" asked Chuck.

"Not even close," she replied. "Something is lacking. Remember how the one I did of me looked alive? That's what I want to try for. I've just got to think of what I did with that one. Is Frank around? Maybe he knows."

"I'm not sure he'd know," Chuck said. "Remember, he doesn't do three dimensional very much. Do you have a copy of your statue up here?"

"No, but I can get one." She reached for her desk and translated her statue to her hands, then put it on the side table beside the statue of Taylor. "Hmm. It's too stiff. I think it's the clothing." She looked back up at the images, particularly the three dimensional one. Then looked back at the statue, and tweaked it a bit, changing the pose and rounding the shoulders some. Then she looked at the statue of her, and remembered what Steve had dumped on her concerning texture, and took another bite of her supper. Texture.

A wild thought hit her, and she moved the statue of Taylor to the floor, then expanded it to about six feet tall and looked at it. As she looked, she finished her supper and Chuck removed her dishes. "I know what's wrong," she said, and feverishly started going over the statue, adding texture to the clothing, putting minor variations of color into the skin, making the eyes a bit more liquid and adding a sparkle. Finally, she looked at the horse, and realized it was too prominent, and made it more transparent. Much better, but still lacked something. It still looked like something poured out of a mold in spots. Hair! She told the shields what to do for hair, and suddenly it was there.

Chuck was looking at it, from various angles. "Wicked. I think you've got it. Steve's manager is going to need a larger gallery," he said, chuckling. "But will it scale back down to desktop size?"

"It should," Muriel said, and made a copy, and scaled it to twelve inch height, and moved the scale back up to her side table.

"Why the copy?"

"Oh, if I goofed in scaling it, I didn't want to have to go through the whole thing again. The thing that concerned me was the details like hair and texture of the clothing. But they seem to have weathered the change in size," she said, somewhat distracted. "This is a bit of a cheat, though, creating it from photos."

"I don't know about that, but you're going to drive some people crazy," Chuck said. "Military equestrian statues have a code for the number of feet the horse has on the ground. Two hooves on the ground, the man died in battle. Three hooves on the ground, he died of wounds sometime later. All four hooves on the ground, he died of natural causes. So, what

does NO hooves on the ground mean?"

"That the artist is crazy?" asked Muriel.

"Well, there IS that possibility." And Muriel hit him. "It's certainly going to set some people on their ear, trying to figure out how you did it. Steve is going to LOVE this."

"I just hope Taylor likes it. I've never tried to do something for someone else, before. At least, not like this," she said.

"Hmm. Let's see. He'll probably want one in the small size for his desk. I wonder if he'll want a life-sized or heroic sized one for out at the road, to advertise the 'Jolly Greens'?"

"Oh, yea. Right. I can just see it. A sign saying, 'Home of the Jolly Greens'. People would think that he was selling vegetables."

"You goof!" Chuck said. "Only YOU would think of something like that."

"Beast!"

"Slave driver," he responded. "By the way, how was the dog food?"

"WHAT? That wasn't dog food. You gave me beef tips in gravy, over noodles!"

"Oh, you DID notice what you were eating," he said.

"When have I EVER failed to noticed what you served me?"

"Well, there's been a few times. Mostly when you were so distracted with other things, and could be forgiven for not noticing," he said, gently, and with no accusation to it. "I thought this was going to be one of those times. I've seen you when you get intense, you know. EVERYTHING but what you're working on is blocked out, then. Yea, I think Taylor will like it. I KNOW Steve will. He'll want to at least push it to life sized."

"Well, I can get rid of the larger version, now, I think," she said.

"Oh, don't do that. Send a copy of the smaller one to Taylor, and the larger one to Steve. Saul should be awake. Envoys never sleep. And it's only five o'clock in the morning, there. See what he thinks."

"OK." ::Saul? Are you busy?::

::Not at all, Muriel. What can I do for you?::

::Taylor wanted me to do a statue of him. I've got one he might like,:: she sent, and translated a copy of the small one to him.

::WOW! Wait a minute.::

::MURIEL?: Taylor's unmistakable mental voice shouted at her. ::How? It's floating. And this late at night for you?:

::Invisible shield between the ground plane and the horse, of course,:: she sent back. ::And what are you doing up so early?:

::Couldn't sleep. Trying to see if we missed anything in the report we gave you. Sorry it was so sketchy.::

::Don't be sorry,:: she responded. ::We got the trigger man, and milked him for names. The trigger was a web page, and the detonators were cell phones set to show that page when it was uploaded. The Coast Guard pulled it in, and didn't know what they had.::

::Say, look. Do you suppose this would scale up?: Taylor sent, and Chuck started laughing.

::Well, I did work from a six foot model, when I put in the texture,:: Muriel said. ::Why?:

::Because, something like this, out by the road, but in a much larger size would definitely advertise where the 'Jolly Greens' were,:: Taylor sent. ::With a sign that says, 'The Regiment of Home'. You DO know that when the other Ambassadors see this, they're all going to want you to make one of them, don't you?:

::Oh, gad. I never thought of that,:: she sent. ::Send it back, and I'll make sure it's destroyed.::

::NOT ON YOUR LIFE!:: His mental shout almost rocked her. ::Don't you know it's sacrilege to destroy works of art? Especially master works! Nope. This is going on my desk, and if you can get a heroic version I'll put it in the median near the entrance to Enclave. Steve did the life-sized one of you, didn't he?:

::Yep. I was going to send him the six foot model, and see what he thinks. Come to think of it, though, maybe the smaller size would be better to send him, then talk to him about scaling it up.::

::Let him decide. He deserves the chance to see ALL your work, girl,:: Taylor said.

::OK, OK, I'll contact him.:: And Muriel dropped out of that connection and sent to Steve. ::Steve, I've got a work I just finished, and you said you wanted to see more of my stuff. If you're not doing anything, why don't you come over.::

::Be right there,:: he responded. ::Where are you?:

::My apartment. I'll bring you up.:: And a second later, he was viewing both the miniature and the six foot model.

"I see what you did there. You started small, then blew it up to work on the texturing. THEN reduced it down again. That's not bad, but it causes a bit of a problem with the way clothing drapes on the figure. What did you work from?" he asked.

"Those," Muriel said, pointing to the screen. "Chuck installed a program on the computer that would combine pictures into a three dimensional representation, back when the new computers were handed out."

"Heard about those. Never saw one. No need, for me. So, what's Taylor want. I know it must be something if you're trying to improve on a masterpiece."

"Heroic size. He wants to put it in the median, where the driveway to his Enclave is. Kinda telling the world that that's where the home of the Regiment of Home is. But this is no masterpiece. I don't think it's as good as my first one."

"Well, it is. Maybe better. Your first one you had to pull out of your own self image, from two times in your life. Some of the proportions suffer a little because of it. This is in proportion. And I like the way you used a hidden shield to support the whole thing, to show it was actually in the air. You could give it more distance to the ground, but in miniature it's good," Steve said. "Texture on the large one is good, and it miniaturized well. Love the hair, mane and tail. You caught them well. I'd have to see what happens pushing it to heroic size, but I don't think I'd have to do more than touch up some texturing. Yea, I can blow this up for you."

"Thanks, Steve. I owe you."

"Nope," he replied. "My honor. You do good work. The first could have been a fluke. The second proves you. Can we use this in the art gallery?"

"Of course, if you think it's worth it."

"Good," he nodded. "Heroic for show, and miniatures for sale to the visitors. And yea, we're getting more and more of them since the manager moved us to the new location. We're still selling miniatures of the ones of you. Oh, speaking of which, I got with the Russian President, and we found a place for the life sized one of you for him. OK, I'll let you know when I've got it done, and we can take it over to Taylor and put it where he wants it."

"Thanks, Steve," Muriel said, and he translated out with a copy of the small one, and the large one.

# Chapter 40

## Payback

(Saturday morning, early)

::Muriel? Are you awake?::

::I am, now. Who's this? Steve?:: she asked.

::Yes. I've got it done. The only place I could work on it was outside, though, and it's kinda blocking the street. Can we get it over to Taylor?::

::Give me a minute to get dressed. I'll be right there,:: she replied, stumbling to the bathroom. It was only a few minutes, after a fast shower and into her uniform, that she was standing in front of the statue. Steve had set lights around it so that it would appear like it would in daylight. And it was impressive. It was also huge. Muriel could see where Steve had touched up the texture, only because she knew what the original had looked like. He'd rounded some of the wrinkles a little to make them look more natural, and had given a little more texture to the body horsehair. Other than that, it really wasn't changed.

"OK, let me get in touch with Taylor, and have him show us where he wants it. I think he'll probably want to put it on a concrete pad, too."

::Taylor, are you awake?::

::Muriel? You've got to be kidding! It's noon, here. What are you doing up so early?:: Instead of replying, she just sent him her view of the statue.

::WHOA! OK, can you give me the dimensions of the base, so I can prepare a place for it?:: he asked. Muriel asked Steve how big the base of the statue was, and relayed the figures to Taylor. ::OK, give me a couple of minutes. Some of my Envoys are down there, now, getting the place ready. As soon as they've got it, I'll give you the image, and you can translate it directly there.::

It was more like ten minutes, but reasonable if the Envoys felt they had to go deep to anchor the pedestal. Then Muriel got multiple views of the pad they'd built, and shared them with Steve. He mentally centered the statue on the pedestal as a target point, then the statue, and Muriel and Steve translated in.

"Taylor, I don't know if you ever met Steve. He's the one that did the live-sized version of my statue. And he was nice enough to blow this up for me."

"Steve," he said, acknowledging the introduction. "You do good work. I liked the statue of Muriel Past and Present, but this . . . this is phenomenal. What is it? half again life-sized?"

"Something like that. You DID say heroic. Love the expression on your face. That wide mouthed grin, with your posture standing in the stirrups - excitement mixed with the joy of life, and the outrageousness of what you were doing," Steve said. "I thought Muriel captured it perfectly. And this time I had to do very little work to make it this size. Just minor touch ups that the smaller statues wouldn't show. You may scare some people driving up the road, though."

"Well, that's what ditches are for," Taylor quipped. "No, this is perfect. Better than I hoped for. I was figuring life-sized. Does it have as much weight as it appears to?"

"Well, actually, less. That's because it's hollow. But it's stabilized - it's not going to blow over. And, of course, because it's shields, it's indestructible," Steve said. "Just throw some water over it once in a while to wash it off. No scrubbing necessary. And that's mainly because the hair can pick up dirt and debris. Dirt should just slough off the rest of it."

"So, how's business?" asked Muriel.

"You're not going to believe this. Business is great. Unfortunately, half of it is kids wanting to see the famous 'Jolly Greens'. The street is lined, both sides, with parents and kids that have gotten up early to watch the morning parade," Taylor said. "And when we do drills, out on the parade ground, the whole ground is lined with them. And recruitment has soared with young people just out of high school wanting to join up. And only maybe one out of a hundred can't pass the initial test to be trained. We don't do the basic training here, anymore. The Queen made good her promise to find us a place to take over and rebuild as a training center, and to house the rest of the regiment."

"Does that mean that your village isn't paying for itself?" asked Muriel.

"Oh, no. There's plenty of people that come to see that, too. and maybe half the ones that come to see the regiment stay to tour the village," Taylor said. "And the school is working VERY well. We had to restrict it to those twelve and above, and still had more requests for enrollment than we could handle. And all of them are trained. In fact, we keep them occupied by putting them through additional training in some of the things that your friends have come up with. We've been turning out doctors, engineers, and teachers at a phenomenal rate, as well as some solicitors - what you call lawyers. There are schools popping up all over the country staffed by fourteen to sixteen year olds using your Don's techniques, and building on them."

"MUM! LOOK! IT'S HER!"

"What the . . . ?" Muriel spun around and saw a car stopped at the traffic light, with a child hanging half out the window.

"Well, I think I've just been put in my place," laughed Taylor. "You show up, and suddenly it's YOU they want to see, and ignore me. I'll just have them pull off in the median, shall I?" As the car pulled out of traffic and onto the median, a body shot out of one side of it, aimed for Muriel. Unfortunately, the light had changed, and the first car off the line was aimed

for the same place that the young teenager would be transiting. Muriel didn't even bother to think. She just lifted the boy above the traffic, then translated him directly in front of her.

"How old are you, boy?" she asked. "No, don't bother to answer. I'll tell you. Not old enough to leave your mother's hand. Even at twelve, I and my twelve friends had enough sense to check for traffic. You're NOT invulnerable. You can be killed, and in some very messy ways," her quiet voice went on. "Now, the question is, do you want to take that risk for very real reasons, like saving the life of a friend or a family member? Or do you want to throw your life away by pulling stupid, bone-headed stunts just because you want to meet someone famous? You DO have a choice, you know."

By this time, the child's mother was across the street - safely - and Taylor was beside her. And it looked like she was going to give him what-for for the stunt he pulled. Muriel looked at her, and shook her head, and Taylor touched her arm to get her attention and told her to let Muriel handle it.

"I made a mistake, once," Muriel went on. "I was lucky. I was so focused on something that I'd done that I failed to notice five people pull guns and shoot at me. Yea, I was lucky. I not only had a shield, but one that would stop those bullets. It wasn't until I heard the bang that I realized that my own squad had shot at me."

"What did you do?" the kid asked.

"I picked the bullets out of the shield, in shock. My father has them. Fortunately, the reason they shot at me was to prove that my shield would protect me. I've seen a man, in another test and this time with only a baseball bat, put his hand out and STOP the bat before it connected with his shield. All he caught was the movement out of the corner of his eye, and his hand was there. The bat stopped a foot from it," Muriel said. "Now, which would you rather be? The dumb girl that couldn't even see five people in front of her pull guns? Or the man that had his back to his assailant, and STILL managed to be aware of his surroundings enough to stop that bat?"

"How do you do something like that?" he asked.

"By being aware of where you are and what you're doing. By being aware of what's going on around you," Muriel said. "Yes, you're focused on what you need to do, but at the same time you're aware of everything that's going on around you that might impact on what you're doing. And it takes practice. Practice at slower speeds, in less dangerous situations, until it becomes a habit - an instinct. And you can do it. And I know what I'm talking about. I don't train failures. I train people that can succeed. And they turn out to be the same way. Now, how many people are around you? Without looking."

"Um . . . ."

"Uh, huh. There's three. And an Envoy. How can you tell?" The boy's eyes bugged out. "What's the difference between an Envoy and a human? Come on, by now EVERYBODY knows the answer to that one. It's certainly been talked about enough. What's



an Envoy?"

"A messenger. A soul."

"And what's a human?"

"A soul in a . . . ." and he started shaking. Muriel created a chair and sat him down, then knelt next to him and started the almost chant to reconnect him to the real world.

"That's it. Don't fight it, just let it flow through you. It won't hurt you. It can't. It IS you. That's it. Now come on back. Come on. I'm right in front of you. You can see me. Come on . . . ."

Taylor, during this time, was reassuring his mother that there was nothing wrong. In fact, something wondrous was happening to her son, and he'd never be the same. He'd still be her son, but also something much more.

Slowly, the boy stopped shaking and his eyes opened. "Wow. OK, I wasn't expecting that," he said. "It's like there's a whole different world around me."

"Geez, girl. You've still got it. I didn't think you were training anymore," Taylor said.

"Get real. Just because I've managed to teach others how to do it isn't going to stop me from having the fun," Muriel replied, grinning. "Ma'am, your son is now something more than just your son. But he'll ALWAYS be, first, your son and ALWAYS still himself. He just connected to his soul, and has more experiences and abilities to draw on. He will need some time to come to grips with it, and to learn a few things. But that doesn't have to take a lot of time. Just a few days to get him squared away."

"Ma'am," Taylor said. "I've got the people that can teach him what he needs to know. It won't cost you anything. And, if you don't need to be anywhere for, oh, maybe four days, we'd be happy to have you as a guest, and you can see some of the things that he'll be able to do. Muriel, I'm taking over this one. No sense in taking him to America, where he wouldn't know anyone and everything would be unfamiliar. I know you've done it before. But I should be training civilians, too, and not just the kids in the school."

"You got him. I don't mind. But we're getting more and more breakthroughs as we go along. Can you handle them?"

"I can always holler for help," Taylor said. "Plus, I've got a hundred people here that can train, and a squad of Envoys. Heck, even some of the Envoys in the village can train. And I'll see about putting up another building, next to the school, for civilian drop-ins."

Muriel just nodded, then looked back at the kid while Taylor talked to the mother about staying for about four days, free of charge. "How you doing, kid?"

"You're human," he said. Then pointed to Steve and said, "He's not. He's an Envoy?"

"Yep. He's the one that made that statue. We were over here just to deliver it."

"Cool statue. That's the Prince, isn't it?" he made the question a statement.

"Yep. At the signing for the Enclave of China, the Queen came in surrounded by Taylor and his regiment. That's when he stood up in the stirrups to signal the double squad to go into their performance," Muriel said.

"Don't let her kid you," Taylor said. "She made the original. All Steve did was blow it up and add some details. Not to put Steve down. He's quite an artist and does phenomenal work. But the basis for this was hers."

The kid looked at Taylor, then looked at the statue, then back at Taylor. "Geez. I'm sitting in the presence of the Prince," he said, struggling to get up.

Taylor just put his hand on the kid's shoulder, and pushed him back. "Stay down until you're stabilized, son. Though I appreciate the thought, right now, you're more important than I am," he said, grinning. ::Sid. I need someone to move a car to a parking spot. We've got a couple of civilian guests, one of which needs training. He just got connected.::

::SIR! On the way, sir!:: And in seconds, the car disappeared from the median, and appeared in a parking space near the front gate. And Saul showed up.

"Connection? I thought I felt something."

"You're another Envoy, aren't you?" the kid said.

"Yes, sir. I'm the Prince's security chief and chief trainer. We'll get you fixed up, sir, no problem." Then turning to Taylor, he said, "The manager of Guest House is expecting them, and has rooms for them and Envoys ready to serve them."

"OK," Taylor said, "we go in from the street, so they can see the front gate. Then up to the rooms by elevator. That way, they have continuity. Muriel," he added, "I know you must have gotten up early for this. You don't have to stay, now. We've got it covered. And thanks for the statue. You too, Steve. You did a great job of enlarging it. Real super-pro stuff."

"Well! I guess I've been dismissed," Muriel countered, grinning. Taylor grinned back. "If you're sure, then yea, I'll go back and see if they'll let me catch a couple hours more sleep. But this was so worth it."

"Can I ask a question before you leave?" asked the kid.

"Sure."

"Who was the guy that caught the baseball bat?"

"Oh, that was an Air Force general. He'd been a pilot, and was probably the most aware person I've ever trained. With the possible exception of a Secret Service officer. And that's why I know you can do it. They were just ordinary people that went to great lengths to make something of themselves, each in their own way."

"Oh. Thanks. I think I see what you're trying to say. I'll work on it. Bye."

"Bye, kid. Good luck. Steve, let's go home." And they translated out.





## Meet the Author

Craig A. Eddy

I'm 67, retired and proud of it. I live in a science fiction world. When I was 14, I wanted a computer that would do the things the room sized ones could do, but would fit in a briefcase. I was thinking small. What I ended up with a few years later was one that could do those things and fit in my shirt pocket. And it's just gotten better. I've been a CAD operator (18 1/2 years) and a number of other things in my life, and now I write fantasy novels for my own amusement using a computer with no paid software on it. All free. Even the operating system (Linux).

Currently writing Fantasy books that are available as PDF files under Creative Commons License.

Bragging rights:

I have a Bachelor of Arts degree in Philosophy a B.A. in BS